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ABSTRACT

The Mass Communication and Society section of the proceedings contains the following selected 14 papers: "When No News Is Not Good News, Ignorance Is Not Bliss, and Your Mama May Not Have Told You: Female Adolescent Information Holding and Seeking about Sexually Transmitted Diseases" (Donna Rouner and Rebecca E. Lindsey); "Newspapers & the Internet: A Comparative Assessment of News Credibility" (Gregg A. Payne, David Dozier, and Afsheen Nomai); "Can Using Qualifiers Initiate Active Processing of Exemplars?" (Stephen D. Perry, John Beesley, Dave Jorgensen, Dave Novak, and Kari Catuara); "Media Ownership and 'Bias': A Case Study of News Magazine Coverage of the 2000 Presidential Election Campaign" (Craig Flournoy, Danielle Sarver, and Nicole Smith); "Do Newspapers Keep Autonomy in Times of National Crisis? A Case Study of the IMF Crisis in Korea, 1997-1999" (Irkwon Jeong); "Agenda Setting & Attitudes: An Exploration of Political Figures during the 1996 Presidential Election" (Spiro Kiousis); "The Effects of Warning Labels on Cellular Phones in Korea" (Sung Wook Shim and Jongmin Park); "Word People vs. Picture People: Normative Differences and Strategies for Control Over Work Among Newsroom Subgroups" (Wilson Lowrey); "Better Informed, No Say: Internet News Use and Political Efficacy" (Young Mie Kim); "Media Participation: A Legitimizing Mechanism of Mass Democracy" (Erik P. Bucy and Kimberly S. Gregson); "From Wall Street to Main Street: An Analysis of Stock Market Recommendations on TV Business News Programs" (Bruce L. Plopper and Anne F. Conaway); "Media and Democracy: News Media's Political Alienation Effect in Both Election and Non-Election Settings" (Tien-tsung Lee); "Misrepresentation of the Race of Juvenile Criminals on Local Television News" (Travis L. Dixon and Cristina Azocar); and "Redefining Homelessness: How Tucson Recyclers Resist the Media's Stereotyping" (Deborah Kaplan). (RS)

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CS 510 708

# When no news is not good news, ignorance is not bliss, and your mama may not have told you: Female adolescent information holding and seeking about sexually transmitted diseases

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Paper submitted for consideration to be presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, **Mass Communication and Society Division "Marginalized Groups" panel**, August, 2001.

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# When no news is not good news, why ignorance is not bliss, and what your mama may not have told you: Female adolescent information holding and seeking about sexually transmitted diseases

## Abstract

Health researchers acknowledge a limited understanding of the social context of adolescents regarding their decision-making behaviors about serious health issues, such as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and pregnancy prevention, as well as other concerns. Communication research suggests inadequate knowledge about interpersonal and mediated communication patterns of adolescents, particularly on matters related to sexual decision making.

This study looks at a group that is not the most common subject of communication research, 18-year-old females, and explores their perceptions of themselves regarding their ability to make sound health decisions, their information holding and use about STDs, media and interpersonal communication channel use, their knowledge and perceived knowledge levels.

Fifteen first-year college students from a Western university engaged in depth interviews. Findings suggested strong confidence, but weakly developed self-concepts relative to this subject area; low amounts and inaccurate information holding, difficulty finding information from mediated sources and limited interpersonal communication.

Suggestions for pursuing this line of research are included.

# When no news is not good news, ignorance is not bliss, and your mama may not have told you: Female adolescent information holding and seeking about sexually transmitted diseases

Communicating about sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) to adolescents and young adults, a group at risk for these diseases in the United States, lags behind the scientific community's acknowledgment of the seriousness of STD epidemics among youth.

On the one hand, scientific advancements have identified myriad health threats from STDs for adolescents and young adults. The health status of adolescents has been shown to decline as health threats have increased. At the same time, adolescents have been left out of clinical research studies across areas of inquiry, and health researchers have had to extrapolate from either research on adults or research on children (DuRant, 1995).

About one quarter of sexually active adolescents are believed to become infected with an STD (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1994). Adolescent females are more likely to acquire chlamydial infection than older females, for examples, with 1 in 10 adolescents currently infected (Centers for Disease Control [CDC], 1994). Although 25% of gonorrhea cases are female and have been decreasing in the general population, the decline is occurring slowest among adolescents. Genital herpes is increasing at a rapid rate, and even adolescents who have not technically experienced sexual intercourse demonstrate a high risk of contracting STDs. Adolescent males are more likely to be diagnosed with herpes, chlamydia or genital warts (CDC, 1994).

On the other hand, adolescents have been found to hold insufficient knowledge about STDs, even when they have a history of an illness, like gonorrhea (MacDonald et al., 1990). Information about these threats and their prevention may not be sought by or easily accessible to adolescents, or delivered by health providers, educators and others when the opportunity arises. Health officials have been found to inquire about and communicate information about STDs to young adolescent patients seeking care related to sexual health in clinics about 40% of the time (Boekeloo, et al., 1991; Languille, Mann & Gailiumas, 1997). Communication and mass communication research in this area is nascent and sparse (c.f., Brown, 2000).

Available information about HIV and AIDS has increased the past few years, and individuals have become more knowledgeable about this disease and its prevention. Television and newspapers are cited as important news and public affairs information sources about HIV by young people (Weinstein, Rosen & Atwood, 1991). Audiences are used to seeing and hearing about HIV, and some population subgroups are more likely than others to take precautions. The mass media attention to the HIV epidemic in the United States may preclude adequate attention to other important STDs to which adolescents and young adults are more vulnerable.

Because of the tremendous suffering HIV and AIDS patients experience, and the needed attention to help these victims cope with the disease, including living and dying with dignity, some less dramatic STDs may seem less threatening, even surmountable. It could be that because HIV information is considered so necessary for young people, conveyance of that information occurs at the expense of disseminating information about other STDs to which the young people may be much more susceptible. In addition, news media may find the less dramatic STDs more difficult to report, e.g., finding appropriate news pegs difficult.

Although knowledge about some STDs is easier to locate, less information is accessible about diseases like chlamydia and pelvic inflammatory disease (DiClemente, Hansen, & Ponton, 1996). Portrayals about STDs in popular media consumed by adolescents–media that are highly sexually oriented--do not provide much information, and few story lines and social role models exhibit healthy decision making and sexuality ( Greenberg, Linsangan, & Soderman, 1993; Kunkel, Cope, & Colvin, 1996; Roberts, 1980). It is not surprising, then, that more prime time and daytime dramatic television viewing is associated with a greater endorsement of recreational sex by young adults (Ward and Rivadenyra, 1999).

A content analysis of consumer magazines, found to be an important source of sex and health information for young girls, revealed only 9% of magazine content studied from 44 publications contained any information about non-HIV STDs (Walsh-Childers, Treise, Gotthoffer & Ringer, 1998). A more specialized focus on teen magazines' content directed to young black women also showed scant evidence of such content (Dixon, 1998).

A study by the Kaiser Foundation found television, perhaps the medium most saturated with sexual content, presents few portrayals of contraceptive use (Kaiser, 2001). Situation comedies were the least likely of all programming to show contraceptive use–only 3% of the time, and of 88 scenes found to depict or strongly imply sexual intercourse, none–not even on teen dramas--made even a passing reference to safe sex (Kaiser, 2001).

At this point, non-HIV sexually transmitted diseases are increasing at rapid rates among adolescents, and information about these diseases is 1) difficulty to come by, even obscure, and 2) "protected" from young people to the extent that some educational institutions still do not included curricula on this topic. Controversies exist within college and university human subjects review boards as to the dangers and damage of keeping this information from young people, particularly young adolescents entering puberty who are the most protected from STD information (English, 1995; Peterson & Leffert, 1995). Indeed, the most protected individuals, young adolescents, may be the last to know about what may be threatening, even life threatening, to them.

Including communication models in the study of STD prevention is important in its interdisciplinarity. Early research and educational interventions were not necessarily theory-based (Grimely, DiClemente, Prochaska, & Prochaska, 1995), and in the last decade a number of health researchers have called for new theoretical and methodological approaches to studying health issues like STD prevention, particularly among adolescents. They are recommending more community participation in research processes, movement toward more anthropological perspectives, and inclusion of the social contextual factors in which sexual behavior takes place and the meaning of sexuality in people's lives (Huygens, Kajura, Seeley, & Barton, 1996).

Education programs that have been based on theories used for adults may miss the mark. Teenagers may differ from adults in a number of ways–they may attach less personal meaning to threats, weigh risks differently, show heavier reliance on peer norms, have different biological predispositions, and have less developed cognitive skills than adults. The contextual factors associated with adolescence might overshadow the predictive nature of theories. Contextual factors may be critical; for example, drug use is found to correlate with the higher risk of contracting an STD (DiClemente, Hansen, & Ponton, 1996). Working against communication and educational prevention efforts are such processes as adolescent taboos; low perceived locus of control, or the efficacy one feels about health decision making; the personal fable; risk behaviors and social-cognitive immaturity (Collins, 1993).

A great amount of the behavior associated with STD acquisition involves interpersonal communication and relationships, generally of an intimate sexual nature. In addition, the sex and sexuality link with the diseases places great emphasis on the social--the perception of social relationships and cultural phenomena (DiClemente, Hansen, & Ponton, 1996).

Prevention campaigns and educational interventions need to by tailored to meet the needs, concerns and interests of different adolescent populations, including campaigns and programs that take into account sensitivity to cultures, developmental differences, and gender appropriateness (DiClemente, Hansen, & Ponton, 1996; Wingood & DiClemente, 1992).

At this point in time, we know about differences in disease rates among members of various racial and ethnic groups, and across the sexes. Attempting to document racial, ethnic, gender and other social structural differences for STDs in adolescents is dependent on the quality of the data available and reported. The rate of gonorrhea, for example, has been shown to be 44 times higher in black male adolescents and 16 times higher in black female adolescents than the rates of infection in white counterparts (Webster, Berman, & Greenspan, 1993). Hispanic rates are lower than blacks, but still higher than white adolescents (DiClemente, Hansen, & Ponton, 1996). Because we have so much yet to learn and understand, and because adolescents are not a homogeneous group of people, we need to create ways of studying these populations that include their cultural values and norms (DiClemente, Hansen, & Ponton, 1996).

In addition, some of the diseases are different in their threats and nature of occurrence across the sexes. This paper takes a particular look at female adolescent information seeking and media use behaviors. Before we can investigate how people process STD information, we must understand the nature of that information, where adolescents seek that information, how much they trust that information, and more.

Little research on communication about non-HIV STDs assists scientific inquiry into this topic. We do not know what individuals do with messages, how they interact with others about this topic, or even what kinds of information is available for them to access if they were seeking information.

Recently health researchers have argued for models that examine the acquisition of health-enhancing behaviors, for example, stages of change theories that assume individuals must progress through successive phases, eventually shifting attitudes and behaviors toward more preventive and healthful behaviors (Grimely, DiClemente, Prochaska, & Prochaska, 1995.

Our study assumes more research is needed to identify salient health concerns of adolescents about STDs, in an effort to help understand teen processing of health messages, as well as in the design of effective message campaigns and educational interventions. This paper examines 1.) the extent to which older adolescents, 18-year-old first-year college females, perceive themselves as knowledgeable and hold specific cognitions about non-HIV STDs, and 2.) how they use and regard various information sources about non-HIV STDs, specifically mass and specialized media, friends, family members, health professionals, and other interpersonal sources.

Communication researchers emphasize the importance of studying gender role and sexual information processing among adolescents (c.f., Brown, 2000), as adolescents might be particularly vulnerable to communication at this time. Self-socialization theories assume adolescents do not just directly adopt the behaviors of social role models, or agents, either interpersonally or in the media. Rather, they are active information seekers, regulating their own behavior as they view others and social norms (Brown, 2000; Walsh-Childers & Brown, 1993). Adolescents, and adolescent females in particular, likely experience anxiety regarding sexuality, and the expectations of future roles of mate and spouse (Bosma, 1992).

The importance of investigating within gender, and possibly other demographic and psychographic, categories, seems apparent. Gender differences are found in information processing (Meyers-Levy, 1989; Meyers-Levy & Maheswaran, 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1973); evaluation of advertising, particularly when sexual themes are present (Bello, Pitts, & Etzel, 1983); comparing oneself to ideal body images in advertisements (Pearson, 1992); and the consumption of rock music (Rouner, 1990)

Health researchers have demonstrated differences in the ways males and females process health messages, including fictional narratives (Rouner, Slater & Domenech-Rodriguez, 1998) and advertisements (Slater et. al., 1997).

We need to determine how communication fits into identity formation, a central developmental task among adolescents' development of self-concept, decision making processes and strategies.

Some of the literature that may guide us in exploratory research on this topic might be schema literature, particularly that concerned with development of self-schema, as well as plans for future schema, or a "future self" (Penland, Masten, Zelhart, Fournet & Callahan, 2000; Sheeran & Orbell, 2000). Self-schemas, for example, have been shown to moderate the relationship between intentions and actual behavior (Sheeran & Orbell, 2000). This area of social cognitive theory may be enhanced with a more affective approach, a look at the development of self-concept, including constructs like "the idealized self," or the person whom we would like to be (Higgins, 1987). These concepts, which are related to one's perceptions about oneself, as well as one's thoughts about how one might be in the near future, might work well with adolescents, who are indeed in the life stage of creating a self-identity.

In seeking theoretical perspectives, or attempting to formulate theory specifically for this population, understanding a little about adolescent females' concepts of themselves as decision makers on important health matters, their patterns of information use and their information holding is a necessary first step.

In addition to examining traditional channels used by adolescents for information about health, health decision making, social norms and practices and other related concerns, this study attempted to assess the importance of using new information technology sources, particularly health websites. The authors identified several thousand websites related to STDs in adolescents. However, many of these websites were principally focused on pregnancy prevention, abstinence and HIV/AIDS prevention. In addition, these websites were not always in agreement about STD information, such as symptoms and risks, and many of the sites were accessible only for a short period.

This study posed these general research questions:

RQ1: How confident are female adolescents about their ability to make decisions about STDs, given the information they have?

RQ2: What types of information do female adolescents hold regarding STDs?

RQ3: What type of information-seeking behavior occurs in female adolescents regarding STDs?

## Methodology

In-depth interviews, conducted in the spring and fall of 1999, among first–year college females, provided the data for this analysis. A list of the population of all 18-year-old first year female students, supplied by a Western university's institutional research department, yielded a systematic random sample of 68 subjects. The students received a letter describing the nature of the study, so that when they were called to set up a face-to-face interview on the topic, they would likely view the project as legitimate research. The sample consisted of the first 15 female respondents who agreed to participate, as the interviewers noticed repetitive patterns in their responses, characteristic of in-depth interviewing (Wimmer & Dominick, 1997). Interviews ranged from about 45 minutes to one hour, ten minutes. Subjects received the general information required of human research, including confidentiality precautions adhered to by the researchers. At the end of the interview, the subjects received tokens of appreciation for their involvement.

Interviews were conducted by the principal investigators and research assistants who were trained for consistency in questioning and probing. The co-principal investigator conducted the analysis. Question guidelines, used for consistency across the interviews, represented the most interesting concepts of inquiry.

In order to determine subjects' experiences and knowledge levels relative to information seeking and holding, subjects first responded to questions about any formal education they received about STDs, and how knowledgeable they viewed themselves on this topic. They were asked to name some STDs and provide information about their symptoms. When they named HIV or AIDS, they were probed for other STDs. Subjects were also asked their perception of the amount of risk they associated with STD infection as a college female.

Ascertaining the women's perceived self-schema involved a question and probing as to how each woman viewed herself as a decision-maker about matters of health, specifically sexual health. Following this, a similar question that asked how the subject perceived herself as a decision-maker in the next five years or so, represented future self-concept.

Another method used to determine one's decision-making ability relative to self-schemas is the completion of a social vignette in which they placed themselves. We provided each respondent with a vignette describing a hypothetical friend who had a recent unprotected sexual encounter after having too much alcohol to drink. This friend comes to the respondent and initially indicates fear about the possibility of contracting an STD, but ultimately expresses relief that as a week has passed and no symptoms have manifested, she is probably fine. Subjects were asked how they would respond to this friend.

To determine information-seeking behavior, we inquired about whether subjects had ever sought information about STDs, in what context, and whether the information was useful. They were also asked if they urgently needed information about STDs where they would go for that information, and why; how important it was to them to receive good information, and why. Subjects were asked about interpersonal communication on this topic, including how much they discuss STDs with friends, family members, health professionals and others.

They were asked if and why they thought people might view discussing STDs with other people as embarrassing, and why; whether and when young women might settle for less-than accurate information regarding STDs, and why; and to note any factors that might inhibit people their age from seeking information about STDs.

Subjects were questioned about their past few years, including when, and where they first recalled receiving information about STDs. They responded to a list of potential sources for STD information, indicating by rank which sources were their first through third choices for information, and why. This same list was used to determine their ranking of trust in sources and why.

## Results

The research questions are addressed first, followed by additional information gleaned from the interviews.

**RQ1: Confidence, self-concept and decision making.** All the women felt confident about their ability to make decisions about STDs, given the information they had. They felt that either they already had enough information to make good decisions, or they felt confident that they could find information if they needed it. One woman said, "I don't think I know all there is to know, but I know I have resources to find out it if I [do] need to know."

Eight women indicated they did not see themselves changing their decision-making style or information-seeking behavior after they were out of college. This is not surprising, given most subjects felt they were "very knowledgeable" about STDs. Four subjects indicated that they thought they would either need more information in the future, or that they hoped they would be better decision-makers in the future. For example, one indicated she hoped her decision-making would be better in five years, because "I'll be older and more knowledgeable." The remaining subjects weren't sure how they would change in five years.

A common response was a feeling of invulnerability when they were younger. As one woman indicated:

> I think information seeking is related to maturity. You start realizing what could happen to you, and what's out there, and that you need to be informed about it. I don't think I had good information when I was younger. I just think it wasn't that relevant to me. Coming to college, you meet more people who have experiences with this; you move away and gain more control of your own life

Some women agreed they did not have a great amount of information, but they were confident they could deal with the threats of STD in their lives. For example, one woman stated:

> I'm knowledgeable enough to use safe sex. I feel somewhat knowledgeable; I would know when something is wrong and I'm not feeling well. I use good judgment and I'm fairly good about learning things.

**RQ2. Perceived knowledge about STDs.** Generally, the women perceived themselves as quite knowledgeable about STDs. Only three subjects expressed uncertainty about their level of knowledge about STDs. These women, however, felt that if they needed information they could easily get it. The remaining subjects identified themselves as either "very" or "fairly" knowledgeable about STDs. They had a variety of backgrounds including formal education (sex education and health classes), parents who were in the medical education field and use of books and the Internet for school reports.

A common response was to perceive oneself as highly knowledgeable:

> I've had a lot of sex education at school. Some of my friends' mothers gave us information from Planned Parenthood. My sex education started in elementary school, in Canada...they sat us down and gave us a little sex education. They told us about AIDS and HIV...but it doesn't really kick in until you're older and hear about it.

When asked to remember STDs talked about, this same informant said, "HIV is like the big one they talked about, because it's the prime killer." When pressed to discuss other STDs, this subject said, "I've mostly heard about them from friends who've contracted them. I heard about HPV last year from a friend who contracted it."

This woman, who perceived herself as quite knowledgeable and informed, was unable to name another STD or to describe common symptoms of any STD: "Well, I have some friends and they got something doing something very personal, but I can't remember the names." When asked about specifically about chlamydia, she indicated she had heard of it, and in describing the symptoms, she said she didn't know, "It's just really bad." Later, this same woman said, "I've had two friends get pregnant from oral sex."

**Actual Knowledge of common STDs.** On average, the women named three STDs. The following were named by the subjects as STDs:

AIDS–13 of 15
Herpes–12 of 15
Gonorrhea–10 of 15
Chlamydia–named by 9 of the 15 persons interviewed
Syphilis–6 of 15
Human papilloma virus/HPV–4 of 15
Crabs–1 of 15

**Symptoms.** Seven of the 15 women said they could not identify any of the symptoms of an STD, although several claimed that they would know if there was anything abnormal, such as burning when you urinate, sores or itching. In many cases, the women used those same symptoms to describe all the STDs that they had named. It appeared that the women most consistently gave the correct symptoms for herpes, describing blisters, sores, redness in the genital area, as well as burning during urination.

Five of the women could not name any symptoms of any STD, although they indicated they would know where to go for information if they did want to know the symptoms. One of those five women said that she thought that in girls symptoms are "mainly internal." Because of that, she did not believe knowing a lot of symptoms would be helpful.

**Linking perceived knowledge-holding with actual knowledge.** In response to the question about a friend who reported having had an unprotected sexual encounter but claims to be symptom-free after a week, all 15 subjects said that they would recommend their friend to be checked by a doctor anyway. Only two offered specific reasons for this: first, that symptoms may show up weeks or months later; and second, that they may not have any symptoms and might still be infected with an STD. A few also mentioned the risk of pregnancy.

Looking specifically at women who perceived themselves as quite knowledgeable and their ability to name STDs and their symptoms, one woman said she "couldn't possibly gain more knowledge" on this subject, named HIV, herpes and chlamydia as examples of STDs, but then could not identify a single symptom. She added, however, "genital warts are pretty obvious." HPV is one of the diseases that may, in fact, be difficult to self-identify, as lesions often develop in the cervix.

Other, more general, responses, included, "I know the names and, you know, that some things don't look right, but I don't know the symptoms."

Another woman called herself "very aware of what's going on," and named five STDs, but she was unable to provide any symptoms, for any of the five STDs.

Although two women said they were not very knowledgeable, or did not know, only one of the 15 women indicated she could use more information, and that woman had actually noted some accurate symptoms of a few STDs.

**RQ3: Interpersonal vs. mass-mediate sources of information about STDs.** Only two subjects remembered seeking information about STDs, one specifically for a health class project. Of these two, one indicated she found information in an encyclopedia.

Thirteen of the 15 subjects stated a preference for interpersonal sources of information about STDs. The most common response was for a doctor or health care provider, which 7 noted, because they would know the most, or would have the most trustworthy information. One woman said she did not trust doctors, is intimidated and thinks any symptoms "described to a doctor might be turned into an STD."

Other interpersonal information sources for subjects were mothers and friends. Four of the fifteen women said they speak with friends about these topics, with the rest indicating they did not. Four said they spoke with their mother, one with her sister, and the remaining indicated they did not communicate with family members on this subject. Only one subject indicated she would be more likely to seek information from a friend than a doctor.

Several of the subjects specifically named Planned Parenthood, an organization for women that offers medical treatments, diagnoses and consultations. However, it was unclear whether they would choose to see a person at Planned Parenthood or to obtain written materials from the clinic.

One woman indicated she preferred magazines as a source: "I would probably go to magazines. They usually carry a lot of good information."

Consideration of the Internet as a source of STD information produced an interesting split of reactions. Seven subjects said they would not use the Internet as a source of information about

STDs for a variety of reasons: 1) not having access, 2) not trusting the information, preferring more personal sources, and 3) having tried unsuccessfully to find information on the Internet. Two subjects did not mention the Internet at all as a possible source of information.

The remaining subjects had a different take on the Internet as a source. Two women listed it as their number one choice. One woman selected this as the first choice, even though it was her second choice as far as how much she trusted the source (the doctor was first). She felt that is was an issue of embarrassment and privacy, and that she would prefer to look up information herself so she could decide whether she thought she needed to see a doctor.

According to another woman who named the Internet as her number one choice:

> I know that it isn't always the most accurate information, but [it's good] just to find out if what I was thinking was true. If there was something, I would go to the doctor to confirm. There are places on the 'net to get accurate information about symptoms, descriptions. It's confidential, and it's easily accessed. There is a lot of information and it is under complete secrecy.

Comments about where they recalled coming across STD information in media sources, generally, were revealing by the perceived absence of helpful information, as captured by some of these quotations:

> I haven't really seen anything on STDs on TV. I have seen a little bit in newspaper articles, though.

> I don't remember seeing anything about STDs in a magazine I have read before.

> There's always talk about sex in [women's] magazines, but it's not a source I would put my trust in.

> I would not trust some magazines, newspapers, or the Internet.

> I would use magazines, like *Time* or *Newsweek*. I wouldn't use the Internet as one of my first sources, because it isn't always a good source and that reliable.

> The Internet has so many mixed messages, and they are not always documented by the government.

One woman could remember seeing some specific information in the media, in a music video channel advertisement that featured a drug for herpes outbreaks.

**Credibility of information, trust.** Nearly all of the women indicated that the most trusted source of information about STDs would be a doctor, and most expressed a preference for a female doctor. Pamphlets from health clinics also ranked highly as trusted sources. Although one woman chose magazines as her first source of information, most said that they did not trust women's magazines as sources of information. As one woman said, "A lot of magazines, especially women's health magazines, they have [articles] like, 'Lose 15 pounds in two days.' You know that's not possible, so why would other things in there also be trustworthy?"

Women's responses to our question about their top three choices were typically centered around their trust in the accuracy of the information. Two women expressed a preference for the first choices based more on privacy and less on trustworthiness of the information.

**Other relevant Findings.** Eight of the 15 subjects made a reference to alcohol consumption when describing a sexual encounter that might lead to acquiring an STD, for example:

> That's a huge factor. It limits your ability to know what you're doing to yourself. There's so many times at parties I've seen girls just throw themselves at guys without thinking of the consequences. They put themselves into awkward situations.

Eleven of the 15 women agreed that people their age frequently settle for less than accurate information about STDs. One woman said her friends might "casually look through *Cosmo* [*Cosmopolitan* magazine], and they would talk to their friends over a professional because doctors intimidate them."

Twelve women said they had some type of formal education about STDs. A woman who did not receive information in school settings said, "We had nothing; it was like they don't exist."

## Discussion

The findings from this study suggest communication researchers cannot assume adolescents who consume media information on STDs or who are targeted in health communication campaigns hold any knowledge about STDs, or believe that they need to have such information. Nor can we assume adolescents who have participated in education interventions, or those who have not, and who consider themselves knowledgeable on this subject would be able to recognize or identify an STD if they encountered one. This corroborates other evidence about adolescents' ignorance about STDs (Shucksmith & Hendry, 1998).

The women in this study exhibited confidence and self-assuredness. They seemed in control of their own health decision-making. They appeared empowered, but ill informed. This could just be characteristic of college women, who may actually be less informed and less aware of their ignorance than their non-collegiate counterparts.

The reactive mode of these women, relying on information they may have acquired in health classes in elementary or junior high school, some as much as 10 years earlier, mentioning action to acquire information at some future time if needed, and having resources they might go to if in need of help, suggests they do not operate in a preventive health manner. They may believe they know where to get information, but because they are not necessarily accessing information or monitoring changing information, the information they might come across could be outdated or unavailable. They are neither aware of new information nor new information sources, e.g., web-based health sites. Indeed, only two indicated they had ever sought information on STDs; only one of them remembered she sought that information from an encyclopedia.

In addition, most of the women did not necessarily view themselves as changing in their information seeking behavior relative to this topic in the next five years. The few who did indicate they would likely become more responsible decision-makers in the future demonstrated no evidence of how they might obtain the information or the means.

The pluralistic ignorance of this group, generally viewing themselves as informed and empowered, suggests all these women believed that all they needed to do in order to stay informed on this topic would be to continue their current lifestyles, with the information likely to become available to them through specific sources, e.g., a mother who is a nurse, or a doctor who might ask them questions during a routine examination.

The lack of knowledge about STD symptoms, not to mention sexual practices needed to become pregnant (remember the woman who said her friends got pregnant from oral sex) or prevent STD acquisition indicates many of the women would not necessarily identify an STD that they or a friend contracted. As noted earlier, routine medical examinations do not necessarily include the dissemination of or request for information about sexually transmitted diseases (Boekeloo, et al., 1991; Languille, Mann & Gailiumas, 1997). The preoccupation of these women with HIV and AIDS, to the exclusion of other STDs, suggests a possible link with mass media's, particularly news and public affairs media's, likelihood of presenting information on HIV/AIDS to the exclusion of information about other STDs.

Their self-confidence may protect them enough, as they all seemed to express the awareness of the need to protect oneself through condom use, and they would all recommend that a friend who engaged in unprotected sex see a doctor. Women without such strong images of themselves, however, may be even more vulnerable. Although the level of self-confidence evident in this sample is refreshing, it could be a result of selectivity bias, i.e, individuals with high self confidence might be more willing than others to participate in an in-depth interview about STD information use. Even so, this contradictory information provided by the subjects is a useful finding for future research.

The focus on the present, without full acceptance of future consequences was noteworthy. It seemed as though these women were operating in status quo mode, waiting for something to happen; none appeared to operate in a preventive health mind set. None seemed to guide her information seeking or knowledge holding behaviors by preventive health strategies.

Because this study did not directly investigate the women's sexual behavior, even though several subjects volunteered that information, the relationship between knowledge, or perceived knowledge, and sexual activity could not be fully determined. It would be useful to examine whether more sexually active women are more knowledgeable or whether the most knowledgeable individuals were those least likely to have sex.

The comments made about media not providing adequate or trustworthy information is striking, particularly regarding media specifically targeted to women this age. Not seeing anything on television, little in women's magazines, and, for some, on the Internet, does not speak well of our media, which are highly sexual in content.

The split in the sample relative to using on-line sources suggests some hope for easier access; eventual familiarity and comfort with web-based information sources may lead to greater information acquisition. However, it should be noted that even though several subjects claimed the Internet was quite useful to them, these women did not exhibit much awareness or knowledge regarding STDs. In addition, although it seems somewhat comforting to think these women tend to know where to go to get information, once they believe they really need it, they did not exhibit any indication they had the tools to discern accuracy of information or credibility of sources.

The lack of interpersonal communication, even casually, about STD topics seems to be one of the most serious findings, indicating both an inability 1.) to speak frankly with intimate friends and family members about serious health issues and 2.) to communicate with knowledgeable others about matters important to their own health and future. Presumably communicating with a sexual partner might be even more difficult on these topics.

The sample was limited by its small size and homogeneity. However, we believe the richness of these data provide useful guidance in further research on this topic. These data may provide a conservative illustration of the need to further investigate adolescents in different social contexts and the social norms that guide their decision-making behavior. We also believe there is evidence here for a need for presentation of information in the mass media about sexual behavior, social contexts, disease prevention, decision making and more, in public affairs as well as entertainment media. Socialization to these topics might largely come from mass mediated sources, as the subject is so sensitive for women during the preteen, adolescent and young adult years.

Through better understanding groups such as these women, educational interventions, health communication campaigns, educational entertainment ventures, and other prosocial communication efforts may prove useful in solving some of the problems outlined in this study.

One theoretical avenue that seems useful in studying adolescent contexts is in the area described earlier, that of self-schema. As Sheeran and Orbell (2000) have argued, self-schema might serve as important moderators between behavioral intentions and behavior itself. Combining more open-ended approaches to determining adolescent beliefs, using, for example, Ajzen and Fishbein's (1970) theory of reasoned action, with a self-schema approach might prove useful. Both theoretical perspectives take a future orientation, one on the development of the self and the other on the development of positive attitudes toward behavioral propensities that would benefit or protect one's health.

The health beliefs model, where assessments of specific health risks and threats are included as part of the belief system, would also prove useful, combined with communication approaches (Katz, Meyers, & Walls, 1995; Ronis & Kaiser, 1989). For college students, health beliefs about STDs have been found to predict monogamous relationships, using condoms and behavioral change relative to HIV prevention (Yep, 1993). These important views relative to beliefs about practicing preventive and safe health behavior must be included in models that attempt to determine who benefits from available information and how, as well as their motivations for accessing information.

But this is not simply the domain of health communication researchers and specialized media. Mass communicators--news, public affairs, advertising and entertainment media--are remiss in ignoring or avoiding some of these particular concerns of preteen, adolescent and young adult women and men, who are so vulnerable to health epidemics of critical magnitude, such as

HPV and chlamydia.

The young women studied here demonstrated lack of both trust and information acquisition in mass communication sources across the board--magazines, newspapers, television and the Internet. The Internet was singled out as particularly lacking in veracity. Mass communication researchers need to further analyze media message content, as well as audience processes and effects relative to this paucity of presentation, lack of credibility and possible avoidance.

As health researchers have recommended, spending time with adolescents, designing studies that involve participatory processes between researchers, educational interventionists and subjects, may be a superior strategy. This might be the best way to understand the social, cultural and conceptual contexts of youth (Huygens, Kajura, Seeley, & Barton, 1996). In this fashion, communication might become an effective component in prevention.

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Mass Communication & Society Division

# Newspapers & the Internet:
# A Comparative Assessment of News Credibility

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## ABSTRACT

## Newspapers & the Internet:

## A Comparative Assessment of News Credibility

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The present study used an experiment to examine differences in credibility assigned to news read in paper form and the same news read on a web site. Subsequent to exposure to six identical news stories, randomly assigned newspaper treatment and Internet treatment groups rated the credibility of the stories they read, using standard credibility measures. Generally, news stories appearing on a web site were evaluated as less credible than their identical counterparts on paper. Moreover, credibility judgments differed by news topic areas.

# Newspapers & the Internet:
# A Comparative Assessment of News Credibility

This study analyzes how and why audiences assign – or fail to assign – credibility to Internet news. Internet news is defined here as the content of web sites on which newspaper stories are posted. The study is motivated, in part, by *a priori* theorizing and anecdotal evidence suggesting journalists and public relations practitioners, among others, believe news consumers apply different criteria when evaluating the credibility of Internet-disseminated news. The two central questions addressed in this research are whether credibility judgments vary across paper and Internet distribution channels and whether credibility judgments vary across these two channels as a function of story content.

An interest in the attributes and dimensions of credibility in mediated communication has generated a substantial academic literature over the past several decades. The research literature has focused largely on the credibility of news disseminated by television and newspapers (Abel & Wirth, 1977; Berlo, Lemert, & Mertz, 1969-70; Burgoon, Burgoon, & Wilkinson, 1981; Carter, & Greenberg, 1965; Gantz, 1981; Gaziano & McGrath, 1985; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Jacobson, 1969; Johnson & Kaye, 1987; Lee, 1978; Meyer, P.,1988; Meyer, T, 1974; Mulder, 1980; Newhagen & Nass, 1989; Owen & Karrh, 1996); Regan & Zenaty, 1979; Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Robinson & Kohut, 1988; Roper, 1985; Shaw, 1973; Shundar, 1996; Sundar, 1999). What has not been extensively explored, largely because the medium remains a relatively new conduit for news dissemination, is credibility of the Internet and news posted there.

Credibility has been defined variously as the perception of news messages as plausible reflections of the events they depict (Newhagen & Nass, 1989), as well as a global evaluation of the objectivity of a given story (Sundar, 1996). Dimensions of credibility include trustworthiness, expertise, fairness, lack of bias, accuracy, factual rendering, and completeness of a story (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Hovland & Weiss, 1951), as well as believability and community affiliation (Meyer, 1988).

Conceptual and operational definitions of credibility in the present study were informed, in particular, by Gaziano and McGrath (1986) and Meyer (1988). Gaziano and McGrath used factor analysis to isolate 12 attributes of credibility for newspapers and television as media, without regard to specific content. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 12 attributes on a 5-point scale, with 5 being most positive and 1 being least. Credibility scores for both newspapers and television were derived by summing responses. Attributes isolated by the research are listed below:

1. Fair or unfair
2. Biased or unbiased
3. Tells the whole story or does not
4. Accurate or not accurate
5. Invades or respects people's privacy
6. Does or does not watch after interests of readers/viewers
7. Concerned or not concerned about community well being
8. Does or does not separate opinions from facts
9. Can or cannot be trusted
10. Concerned about the public interest or about making profits
11. Factual or opinionated
12. Well-trained or poorly trained reporters

Subsequently, Meyer (1988) replicated the factor analysis, reducing to five the number attributes used to measure credibility, when credibility was defined as whether newspaper content is believed by readers. The five attributes are:

1. Fairness (Is the story fair?)
2. Lack of bias (Is the story unbiased?)
3. Tells the whole story (Is the entire story told?)
4. Accuracy (Is the story accurate?)
5. Trustworthy (Can the source be trusted?)

In addition to such content variables, investigations of news credibility have taken into account modes of dissemination. Dissemination vehicles studied have included newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and multimedia presentations (Owen & Karrh, 1996). Credibility attributes of individuals as news sources (e.g., an on-air personality) and news organizations (e.g., the New York Times or CBS News) have also been assessed (Robinson & Kohut, 1988). News consumers seem influenced by the reputation of news organizations, such as the Wall Street Journal, or other sources routinely supplying news to the public. Such suppliers include major networks, local broadcasts, and local newspapers.

Other studies have discovered relationships between news topics and assignment of credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). Topics evaluated included local news, election coverage, natural disasters, crime, business news, religious news, and news about events in the (then) USSR, the Middle East, and Latin America. The highest credibility score for newspapers was assigned to coverage of the Federal government. For television, greatest credibility was associated with crime and the arms race.

Some researchers have concluded that criteria applied in judging credibility of various media and messages may change from one medium to another, and weight assigned to various credibility criteria may vary across media (Gazianao & McGrath, 1986). Sundar (1999), however, found substantial similarities between factor structures underlying receivers' perceptions of print and online news, including those associated with credibility, suggesting that credibility measures are equally applicable across media. The same study, though, showed that news that readers judged as disturbing was assigned low credibility when disseminated online. News perceived as disturbing had no similar effect on judgments of print news credibility.

Relationships between credibility and demographic characteristics are mixed. Robinson and Kohut (1988) found that when such demographic characteristics as political affiliation were used to predict credibility, they contributed little to explained variance. On the other hand, Johnson and Kaye (1998) found gender, age, and education contributed significantly to assessments of credibility associated with online newspapers, news magazines, candidate literature, and issue-oriented sources. Generally females found the Internet more credible than did males. Older respondents assigned less credibility to online newspapers, news magazines, and candidate literature than did younger ones. Similarly, better educated respondents found online newspapers less credible.

The conventional wisdom, popularized by Roper (1985), suggested that television news is more credible than print. However, Roper's claim is not supported consistently by empirical studies. Credibility is governed, in part, by predispositions of news consumers. Those motivated to actively seek news regard newspapers as more credible than television (Mulder, 1980). Moreover, Carter and Greenberg (1985) found an anti-newspaper bias in Roper's instrumentation.

In sum, prior research shows reasons that news consumers cite for assigning credibility to the news are various and sometimes inconsistent. Credibility attributes across media may not be comparable, since criteria applied to both medium and message may differ. Moreover, where criteria are the same, they may be differentially weighted across media. Under some conditions, television news is found to be more credible than that disseminated by newspapers. In other cases, the converse is true. Sometimes, but not always, credibility judgments can be linked to age, gender, and other demographic characteristics. Credibility assigned to medium varies, depending upon whether news is actively sought. Topical differences affect judgments of credibility, though the differences are not the same for all media examined.

The present study investigated one research question and tested four hypotheses. The research question, does credibility of news vary by topic area, without regard to distribution channel, was posed because prior research results addressing the question are inconsistent. Whereas the research question concerned differences in credibility assigned as a function of news topic area, hypotheses tested differences in credibility as a function of distribution medium. Unlike the research question, the following hypotheses specify the expected direction of relationships and imply one-tailed tests of statistical significance.

### Hypotheses

H1: Paper versions of newspaper stories are rated higher on all credibility measures than Internet versions of the same stories.

H2: Paper versions of business stories post higher average credibility scores than Internet versions of the same stories.

H3: Paper versions of international stories post higher average credibility scores than Internet versions of the same stories.

H4: Paper versions of national/domestic stories post higher average credibility scores than Internet versions of the same stories.

## Method

Investigations of media credibility have traditionally relied on survey research. However, the present study first used focus groups in an exploratory examination of the credibility of Internet news. Focus group findings were used to design an experiment to test relations between delivery medium and credibility.

### Focus Groups

Two focus groups, each consisting of seven students, were conducted. Participants were graduating seniors or graduate students at a West Coast university. Objectives of the focus groups included exploration of the relevance of five attributes of credibility (Meyers, 1988) to Internet-disseminated news. Additionally, insights from the focus groups were drawn upon to develop credibility instrumentation and treatment strategies for the experiment. Consistent with Sundar (1999), credibility attributes were judged by participants to be equally relevant to news material, whether distributed by newspapers or the Internet.

However, introspection in a qualitative setting is not the best way to determine if the mode of news delivery is unrelated to credibility. Although, participants in the focus groups reported that mode of news delivery is unrelated to credibility assessments, prior research (Carter & Greenberg, 1985; Mulder, 1980; Roper, 1985; Sundar, 1999) indicated that the delivery medium does matter. In particular, Mulder's (1980) research provided a theoretical basis for positing the hypotheses above for rigorous test, using an experimental design.

### Experiment

A posttest only design was used. Ninety-two university students volunteered to evaluate the credibility of six news articles. Subjects were randomly assigned to the paper treatment (N=45) and Internet treatment (N=47) groups. In the control condition, students read photocopies of the six stories in paper form. In the test condition, students read identical stories uploaded to a university web site.

In both conditions, publications from which the stories were taken was identified. Although identification of source of publication introduced a characteristic that could strongly influence credibility, using the same source of publication for both treatment conditions held publication credibility constant across conditions. This had the net effect of isolating the effects of the distribution channel (newspaper vs. Internet), independent of the credibility of the source of publication.

Subsequent to exposure, subjects used a questionnaire to rate the credibility of each story. The experimental design is displayed in Figure 1. Consistent with focus group findings and Sundar's (1999) operationalization, the credibility index for each of the six articles included the following six questions:

1) In your view, how trustworthy is the source of this article?
2) In your view, how accurate is the content of the article?
3) In your view, is the content of the article fair?
4) In your view, how well does the article tell the whole story?
5) In your view, is the article source unbiased?
6) Overall, how credible is the story?

Of the six stories, two were selected from the Wall Street Journal, two from the Los Angeles Times, and two from the New York Times. Stories 1 and 2, taken from the Wall Street Journal, were concerned with business-related matters (litigation involving the U.S. tobacco industry and the Microsoft monopoly litigation). Stories 3 and 4, taken from the New York Times, were concerned with international events (Colombian drug wars and the bombing by Breton separatists of a Paris McDonald's fast-food restaurant). Items taken from the Los Angeles Times, stories 5 and 6, concerned domestic matters (an Al Gore campaign address and a Washington, D.C., gay-rights rally). The assumption guiding selection of these newspapers was that none would be viewed by subjects as inherently more credible than the others.

## Findings

Data were coded and entered into an SPSS data file for analysis. Data from control and test groups were aggregated and a credibility index computed for all 92 participants for all six variables. The reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was .89. Analysis of variance was used to test hypotheses. Because H1-H4 specify greater credibility for print over Internet news distribution, a one-tailed test of significance was used. Because the total sample size is less than 100 subjects, tests are reported at the 95% decision rule (alpha=.05) and 90% decision rule (alpha=.10). The latter decision rule is sometimes appropriate with sample sizes smaller than 100 to help assess the probability of Type 2 error (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Williams, 1986).

With respect to the research question, credibility was examined by news content area, without regard to the channel of distribution. The results are displayed in Table 1. Business news, as operationalized in two stories taken from the Wall Street Journal, was judged most credible. International news, as operationalized in two stories taken from the New York Times, was ranked the second most credible topic area. National/domestic news, as operationalized in two stories taken from the Los Angeles Times, was judged least credible. Paired-sample t-tests were conducted on mean credibility scores for each possible combination: business vs. international, business vs. national, and international vs. national. None of the differences in means was statistically significant. Contrary to some prior research findings, subjects in this experiment did not distinguish credibility based on news topics.

Without regard to news topic area, stories distributed via newspapers are judged more credible than their identical counterparts on the Internet (see Table 2). At a 95% level of confidence, news stories in the newspaper are judged more trustworthy, more accurate, less biased, and more credible overall than identical stories distributed on the Internet. At a 90% level of confidence, news stories in the newspaper are regarded as more fair than the same stories on the Internet. The only non-significant difference between newspapers and the Internet involves telling the complete story. In this regard, a story in the newspaper is judged better at telling the complete story than the same story on the Internet; the difference is not statistically significant.

When all measures were combined into a single index of credibility, stories distributed via the newspaper were judged significantly more credible than the same identical news stories posted on the Internet. The mean credibility score for the newspaper treatment group was 2.8; the mean credibility score for the Internet treatment group was 2.4. The difference is statistically significant (F [1/91] = 8.4, p < .05). This confirms H1.

To test H2, H3, H4, credibility indexes were computed for business, international, and national stories. For the two business stories from the Wall Street Journal, the mean score for the newspaper treatment groups was 3.2, compared to 2.6 for the Internet treatment group. The difference is statistically significant (F [1/90] = 3.72, p < .05), confirming H2. For the two international stories from the New York Times, the mean score for the newspaper treatment group was 3.4, compared to 2.2 for the Internet treatment group. The difference is statistically significant (F [1/90] = 9.55, p < .05), confirming H3. For the two national/domestic stories from the Los Angeles Times, the mean score for the newspaper treatment group was 2.9, compared to 2.5 for the Internet treatment group. This difference, however, is not statistically significant (F [1/90] = 1.50, p > .10), disconfirming H4. The test for overall credibility across distribution systems, as well as credibility for two of the three news topic areas, support the conclusion that newspapers are generally regarded as more credible channels of news distribution, when compared to identical news stories posted on the Internet.

## Post Hoc Analysis

Because of the generally homogeneous sample used in the present study, post hoc analysis was restricted to testing gender as a potential covariate affecting judgments of credibility. Analysis of variance showed no difference attributable to gender in assessing credibility of web-based news. Among female subjects, the Internet treatment group posted slightly higher credibility scores than did the newspaper treatment group. Among males, the newspaper treatment group posted higher credibility scores. However, in neither case were the differences statistically significant (see Table 4).

## Discussion

The present study used an experimental design to isolate the causal impact of news distribution medium on perceived credibility of identical news stories. The research design permitted separate tests of the relationship between medium and credibility for three distinct news topic areas. In general, subjects exposed to photocopies of newspaper versions of the same news stories (aggregated across all six stories) assigned greater credibility to those articles than did subjects exposed to the same six stories in an Internet simulation. News stories on paper are judged more trustworthy, more accurate, less biased, and more credible overall than identical stories posted online.

Differences in credibility judgments were not consistent across all three topic areas. Photocopies of actual newspaper articles were deemed more credible than their Internet equivalents for business and international news. The difference in credibility was insignificant for national news, however, though subjects in the paper condition tended to give higher credibility scores than subjects in the Internet condition. One possible explanation for the lower overall credibility scores for the national/domestic news stories (see Table 1) and the disconfirmation of H4 is that these stories came from the Los Angeles Times. It may be that the assumption of equal credibility for all three newspapers was flawed. Subjects may have viewed the New York Times and Wall Street Journal as inherently more credible, because of their long-standing reputation as national newspapers of record. There may also be a familiarity-breeds-contempt phenomenon at work. Subjects in the experiment are in the general circulation area of the Los Angeles Times, and therefore may have been more familiar with its errors, retractions, poor judgments, and general editorial policies. Since the Los Angeles Times is simply one of the "local" newspapers for subjects, this may have generally depressed credibility evaluations for both the newspaper and Internet treatment groups and truncated the effect size of treatment.

By identifying publication source of both paper and Internet stories, (e.g., Wall Street Journal, New York Times, and Los Angeles Times), the present study controlled for the influence of the news gathering organization as a threat to internal validity. Regarding credibility, the present study suggests the Internet is generally an inferior distribution channel. The conclusion that material disseminated via the Internet is less credible must be situated in time. Users frequently view new technologies with skepticism. That skepticism may extend to the Internet as a relatively new channel of news distribution. The breakdown in traditional gatekeeping processes employed by conventional media, resulting in a number of well-publicized hoaxes, pranks, and rumors spread via the Internet, may influence credibility judgments. News consumers have not yet have developed a sophisticated palate for the different types of information providers on the Internet. As such, any information on the Internet may be viewed as low in credibility, even when distributed by elite, prestigious media organizations like the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and the Los Angeles Times. Thus, perceptions of the Internet as a credible news distribution channel ought to be regarding as a moving target.

Limitations of the present study include the general limitations of laboratory research that employs college students as subjects. Now that a causal relationship has been identified for a narrowly defined population, larger studies with more representative samples should be employed to replicate, disconfirm, or specify findings. In addition to replication with more representative samples, additional investigation is required of the link between news topics, credibility, and medium of distribution. Future research should examine the relationship between credibility and perceived functional differences across media, with particular emphasis on the Internet. Further, some of the artificiality inherent in the present research design can be reduced or eliminated in future inquiry. For the Internet condition, for example, news articles could be read on the web sites of the involved news organizations. For the paper condition, stories could be read within the context of the entire newspaper.

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Table 1

Impact of Topic on Perceived Credibility of

Business, International, and Domestic News Articles

| | | | Mean | d.f. | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pair | Business/ | | 2.9 | 91 | >.05 |
| 1 | International | 2.8 | | | |
| Pair | International/ | | 2.8 | 91 | >.05 |
| 2 | National | 2.7 | | | |
| Pair | Business/ | | 2.9 | 91 | >.05 |
| 3 | National | 2.7 | | | |

Table 2

Impact of Paper and Internet Distribution of News Articles on Perceived Credibility

| Credibility Measure | Mean Internet Score | Mean Paper Score | F-ratio | d.f. | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trustworthiness | 2.4 | 3.0 | 7.88 | 1/90 | <.05 |
| Accuracy | 2.6 | 3.2 | 6.86 | 1/90 | <.05 |
| Lack of bias | 2.5 | 3.1 | 7.77 | 1/90 | <.05 |
| Overall Credibility | 2.5 | 3.1 | 7.72 | 1/90 | <.05 |
| Fairness | 2.4 | 2.6 | 1.85 | 1/89 | <.10 |
| Tell complete story | 2.1 | 2.3 | 1.06 | 1/90 | >.10 |

Table 3

Impact of Paper and Internet Distribution on Perceived Credibility

of Business, International, and Domestic News Articles

| | Story Type (source) | Mean Internet Score | Mean Paper Score | F-ratio | d.f. | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H2 | Business (WSJ) | 2.6 | 3.2 | 3.72 | 1/90 | <.05 |
| H3 | International (New York Times) | 2.2 | 3.4 | 9.55 | 1/90 | <.05 |
| H4 | National (Los Angeles Times) | 2.5 | 2.9 | 1.5 | 1/90 | >.10 |

Table 4

Impact of Gender on Perceived Credibility

of News Read on the Internet and on Paper

| | Mean Internet Scores | Mean Paper Score | F-ratio | d.f. | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 2.7 | 2.6 | .013 | 1/87 | >.05 |
| Male | 2.7 | 2.8 | .543 | 1/87 | >.05 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **GROUP 1 (Random Assignment)** | **Newspaper Treatment (6 stories)** | **Posttest Measures of Credibility** |
| **GROUP 2 (Random Assignment)** | **Internet Treatment (6 stories)** | **Posttest Measures of Credibility** |

Figure 1. Posttest only experimental design with six treatments

# Can Using Qualifiers Initiate Active Processing of Exemplars?

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Running Head: USING QUALIFIERS

**Can Using Qualifiers Initiate Active Processing of Exemplars?**

*Abstract*

Studies of exemplification effects have regularly found that the distribution of exemplars can alter perceptions of opinion in news coverage. This study attempts to negate the impact of exemplars through using qualifying statements that suggest that either exemplars are non-representative, or that they represent things that are happening more and more. Results indicate that the impact of the distribution of exemplars is too strong to be overcome by using such statements.

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## Can Using Qualifiers Initiate Active Processing of Exemplars?

Journalists often find it helpful to use exemplars, as well as statistical information when writing news stories for magazines, newspapers, or electronic media. Due to time and space constraints, exemplification becomes important since it allows journalists to communicate thoughts in less time or space. Exemplars (examples) are cognitive shortcuts or illustrations we create or accept from outside sources to represent or signify larger, more complicated groupings of people, ideas, things, etc.[1] They are single incident cameos that represent larger numbers of cases or phenomena, which have some degree of similarity with each other.[2] These shortcuts are helpful, since information overload in our technologically and media rich society inhibits our ability to adequately remember and apply information to our lives. Mental impressions or pictures created by exemplars represent whole categories or types of information, which we can easily, quickly, and competently retrieve for use.[3] That is not to say the mental pictures we employ are accurate. In fact, they usually are not. Nevertheless, we hold them to be representative or illustrative of our opinions or perspectives.[4] The question at issue in this research is whether the frame in which a reporter presents exemplified information allows the news consumer to interpret the representativeness of the exemplar correctly.

In the absence of personal knowledge or experience, exemplars that we acquire from outside sources, including the media, gain power in priming opinion as the only cognitive base from which we can operate. This is an aspect of what is called the availability heuristic.[5] More properly, the availability heuristic includes all the information persons have available to mentally process in order to inform their decisions and opinions. In instances in which exemplars are externally acquired to supply missing knowledge or experience, research has shown that stereotypes can rise out of the acquired exemplars because of the disproportional influence people allow the vivid features of exemplars to exert in opinion formation.[6]

Research has also shown that disproportionate and atypical exemplar usage can change our images of reality.[7] The influence of mediated exemplars upon our opinions and perceptions becomes more pronounced, especially if a reporter lacks the page space for proportionate exemplars or if exemplars are chosen for their aesthetic appeal. In many cases media-generated exemplars become our prime exemplars for a reported issue.[8]

Zillmann and Brosius[9] have articulated a theory of exemplars, listing several potent factors surrounding exemplar usage in news reporting. These factors include: 1) exemplars foster perception in accord with exemplar distribution that may or may not be consistent with the base news report, 2) impressions of reported phenomena follow the exemplar distribution, even when accompanied by differing base-rate information. Zillmann[10] states that it is important for us to determine empirically which exemplification strategies are most effective at conveying accurate perceptions of the population as a whole. If the population distribution of events or attitudes is known, a journalist can proportionately represent the various sides of the issue through representative choices of exemplars. If the distribution is unknown, other methods should be used to try to correct for misperceptions based on exemplar distributions.

The way a reporter frames the use of the exemplars employed in a news report may have a bearing on how influential the exemplars are on the reader's perceptions of a

[redacted]

given news issue. Zillmann suggests that reporters indicate that exemplars are not representative of the population when the distribution of events in the population is unknown. In the case of a singular exemplar, for example, reporters should mention that an event is an isolated case. This method of setting up or qualifying the delivery of the exemplars should encourage the consumer to beware of reading too much into them.

The actual practice of reporters, however, frequently flows in the opposite direction. Reporters emphasize the importance of an issue by suggesting that "more and more" we see certain attitudes or events occur. These "more and moreisms" would be expected to encourage the use of exemplar distributions in interpreting the frequency of occurrence of an event or attitude. Since exemplars are often selectively used to emphasize the novelty of the most unusual views, more and moreisms often frame the use of exemplars in such a way as to encourage inaccurate perceptions. This runs counter to Zillmann's[11] suggestion that reporters indicate when exemplars are not representative.

In order to test whether the frame with which exemplars are presented actually encourages the assumption that the distribution of exemplars is representative, this study varies the distribution of exemplars along with the frame with which they are presented. Based on prior research and Zillmann's theoretical suggestions, we hypothesize the following:

H1: The distribution of perceptions of an event's frequency in the public will vary in proportion to the distribution of exemplars in a news story.

H2: Personal opinion will vary in proportion to the distribution of exemplars in a news story.

H3 = The influence of exemplar distribution on perceptions of event frequency will be reduced when the presentation frame indicates that exemplifications are not representative

H4 = Perceptions of event frequency will be more consistent with exemplar distribution when the presentation frame encourages such perceptions

## Method

In order to test the hypotheses several versions of a magazine news story about a purported attempt to monitor internet usage on the campuses across the nation were created. Both the distribution of exemplars and the qualifiers or frame, in which the exemplars were presented, were varied in an experimental 3 x 3 factorial design. Exemplars were distributed to support, be balanced, or oppose internet monitoring. The qualifiers were also varied so that exemplars were either said to be atypical or to be representative of the trend in student opinion. A third qualifier condition left them out completely.

### Stimulus Material

**Exemplar Manipulation.** A total of 192 students from a Midwestern university were recruited to participate in the study. They were asked to read a couple of magazine stories. First, they read a disguise story about the teaching of character values and citizenship in elementary and middle schools from *Time* magazine, May 24, 1999. The experimental article, "Internet monitoring: A new university fad or here to stay?" was read next. The manipulated article was purportedly from *Computer World* magazine in November of 1999. The articles were followed by a questionnaire.

The manipulated article varied the number of exemplars of college students speaking in support of and opposed to internet monitoring. The fictitious exemplars were each accompanied by a fictitious photograph of a college student. In order to maximize the likelihood of identification with the exemplars, the race and age characteristics of the group of students being exemplified roughly matched the makeup of the student body at the university where the study was conducted (5 white, 1 black, and 1 Hispanic). After setting up the basic scenario of why educational institutions might try to initiate internet monitoring, all versions of the article used the same two initial exemplars featuring students speaking against internet monitoring. The third and fourth exemplars were also identical across all versions with two students speaking in support of internet monitoring.

The manipulation always occurred with the last set of exemplars. In the "Opposing" exemplar distribution condition, the last three exemplars were given in opposition to internet monitoring. For examples, Will, 19, was quoted as saying, "This is an invasion of privacy. Why should the university care what I do in my free time? Are they going to tell me what movies I can watch or what books I can read?" Michelle, reported to be a 21-year-old art major, and John, listed as a 22-year-old advertising student, were the the purported sources for the other two manipulated exemplars. John's exemplar read, "What I want to know is who decides what's an education website? If my 'non-educational' web hits were eliminated, I would have a big problem trying to do legitimate homework."

In the "Supporting" exemplar condition these last three exemplars were reported as coming from people with the same name, ages, and majors. But this time, Will was quoted as saying, "The internet is supposed to be an educational tool, that's why they give it to us free on campus. It's just like the library. You don't see stacks of *Playboys* in there do you?'" John's quote supported internet monitoring by saying, "I don't think that it is a violation of free speech or privacy. The university is providing a service and they should be allowed to determine in what capacity that service is used."

In the "Balanced" exemplar condition Will's exemplar matched that found in the "Opposing" condition, while John's exemplar matched the one that had been attributed to Will in the "Supporting" condition. Michelle's exemplars, which had been varied in the other two conditions, were removed from the balanced presentation so as to provide identical numbers of exemplars on each side of the issue.

Thus, the "Opposing" condition featured five exemplars supporting and only two opposing internet monitoring. The "Supporting" condition featured five exemplars supporting and only two opposing internet monitoring. The "Balanced" condition featured three exemplars on each side.

**Qualifier Manipulation.** Each of the exemplar conditions was further varied by framing the exemplars as typical or atypical or by leaving off any indication of how typical they might be. In the "Typical" qualifier condition, phrases like "more and more students are saying . . ." and "another often heard comment comes from . . ." were used to suggest the exemplars were representative of comments heard across campus.

The "Atypical" qualifier condition used phrases that suggested the opposite. The phrases "while these responses are not necessarily representative of larger student populations . . ." and "at least one student expressed . . ." were used to accomplish this task.

In the condition without qualifiers, occasionally a transition phrase was needed to complete the flow moving into an exemplar. In these cases, neutral qualifiers like "some students are saying . . ." were used to avoid indicating whether or not the exemplars were typical or atypical.

**Questionnaire**

After reading the manipulated article, participants immediately proceeded to the questionnaire. Disguise questions initially asked participants to compare the two stories they had read. Then the questions zeroed in on the issue of internet monitoring. The questions on internet monitoring asked participants to tell what percentage of some group they thought were "for," "against," and "undecided/no opinion" by writing a percentage in the blanks provided next to each of those terms. This same set of measures was used for each of the first six questions. Three questions asked, "What percentage of (a specific group) do you feel are for or against internet monitoring in an educational setting?" The specific group listed in the first question was students who attended the same university as the research participants. The next time the question was asked it focused on "American college students nationwide." The third time the question focused on "American adults 18 years of age or older."

Three other questions asked, "What percentage of (a specific group) do you feel are for or against internet monitoring by government authorities?" The same three specific groups as before were inserted into this question.

In addition three more questions asked, "What percentage of (a specific group) would oppose or support government laws protecting internet privacy in an educational setting?" Participants then gave the percentages of people they thought would "oppose," "support," and be "undecided/no opinion" about the question.

The next page of the questionnaire asked participants about their own opinions on 11-point equal-interval scales. First, they were asked, "Are you for or against internet monitoring in an educational setting?" Responses ranged from totally against (0) to totally support (10). Next, they were asked four questions about specific types of internet surfing that could be monitored. The questions each began "Should (students at your university) be allowed to " and finished with (1) " visit pornography sites from university computers?" (2) " visit on-line gambling sites from university computers?" (3) " visit pornography websites from their own computers using university-based internet access?" and (4) " visit on-line gambling sites from their own computers using university-based internet access?" Responses ranged from "Not at all allowed" (0) to "Definitely allowed" (10).

Two other questions asked (1) how likely it was that students would form at mass protest if the university attempted internet monitoring, and (2) if the student government was to adopt a resolution, how likely it would be that the resolution would support internet monitoring. Both questions were rated from "Not at all likely" (0) to "Very likely" (10). Demographic questions concerning internet usage, e-mail usage, age, year in school, major, minor, sex, and race were asked to conclude the questionnaire.

Once students were finished with the questionnaire, they were dismissed from the research session. Data were analyzed using SPSS software for Windows.

## Results

Composite measures were created through exploratory factor analyses. In the first factor analysis reported, nine questions asked participants for their perception of the proportion of people who would be for (support) and against (oppose) some aspect of internet monitoring. Separate factor analyses were run for both the supportive and opposing percentages. Both gave similar results. The factor analysis using opposing percentages resulted in stronger loadings on single factors. Therefore, only data from the opposing percentages are reported and used in composite measures.

Three factors emerged from the analysis (principal components, varimax rotation, Eigenvalues > 1). Questions asking "What percentage of (1) American college students nationwide . . . " and (2) students at the university where the study was conducted "do you feel are for or *against* internet monitoring in an educational setting" loaded highly on factor 1 at .80 or higher. Additionally, the questions "What percentage of (3) American college students nationwide . . . " and " . . . (4) American adults 18 years of age or older do you feel are for or *against* internet monitoring by government authorities"[12] loaded highly on this same factor at .85 and .71 respectively. This factor was labeled "Against Monitoring." It accounted for 35% of the variance. Chronbach's Alpha = .82 for the variables that made up this factor.

The second factor was labeled "Oppose Laws" and accounted for 25% of the variance. The questions "What percentage of" (1) students at the university where the study was conducted . . . (2) " . . . American college students nationwide . . . " and (3) " . . . American adults 18 years of age or older do you feel would oppose or support government laws protecting internet privacy in an educational setting" all loaded at .80 or higher on the factor. Chronbach's Alpha = .91 for the variables that made up this factor. Secondary loadings were at .30 or lower for all variables in the first two factors.

The third factor accounted for 12% of the variance. The question, "What percentage of American adults 18 years of age or older do you feel are for or against internet monitoring by government authorities?" was loaded at .70, while the question what percentage of students at the university were the study was conducted "do you feel are for or against internet monitoring by government authorities?" loaded negatively at .68. These variables had secondary loadings at .37 and below. Chronbach's Alpha was significantly below .50 for the variables that made up this factor. Therefore, the factor was dropped from further analysis.

A second factor analysis (principal components) was used to confirm that a fourth factor existed. One variable emerged from the analysis accounting for 64% of the variance. Four of the questions that measured the personal opinions of students at the university where the research was conducted loaded at .80 or higher. The fifth and final variable had a high negative loading (-.719). These variables were to form a composite measure labeled "personal opinion." Chronbach's Alpha = .86 for the variables that made up this factor.

Composite measures were formed by summing the variables that loaded positively on a factor and then adding the inverse of any negatively loading variables. The final total for each was then divided by the number of variables to create average scores.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was then used to test the influence of the independent variables on each composite measure. Exemplar condition significantly impacted perceptions of the percentage of those thought to be against internet monitoring (F = 3.78, p < .05). Students reading the exemplars in the supporting condition perceived a smaller level of opposition to internet monitoring (M = 63.1%) than those reading either the balanced (M = 69.4%) or opposing (M = 71.9%) exemplar condition internet monitoring stories. The use of qualifiers had no significant effect in the model.

The second composite measure, "oppose laws," failed to result in any significant ANOVA results. The third and final composite measure, "personal opinion," was significantly affected by the main effect of distribution of exemplars (F = 3.65, p < .05). Those who read disproportionately supportive exemplars in the internet monitoring article were more likely to lean toward being supportive of internet monitoring efforts (M = 5.91) compared to those who read exemplars that mostly opposed internet monitoring (M = 7.11). Those who read the balanced article (M = 6.28) reported opinions that failed to differ significantly from either of the disproportionate conditions. Lower means indicated being more inclined toward supporting internet monitoring due to the way composite measures were created. The use of qualifiers again failed to have a significant effect on the model.

## Discussion

As was expected based on previous research[13], the first hypothesis was confirmed. Perceptions of public opinion showed greater expectation of support for internet monitoring after participants were exposed to the "Supporting" exemplar condition. Those exposed to the "Opposing" condition perceived more opposition to internet monitoring. Exposure to the "Balanced" condition resulted in perceptions that fell in between "Supporting" and "Opposing," but such perceptions were only significantly different from exposure to the "Supporting" condition.

The second hypothesis was also confirmed. As had been found by Perry and Gonzenbach[11] in their study of televised exemplars, we found that magazine exemplars can influence not only perceptions of opinion, but can also influence the personal opinion of the participants. Personal opinion was influenced in the direction of exemplar distribution with those exposed to "Supporting" exemplars reporting more personal support for internet monitoring than those exposed to the "Opposing" condition. Means for the "Balanced" exposure fell in between the other two conditions, but did not differ significantly. Therefore, the relationship between exemplar distribution and perceived opinion and personal opinion appears to be strongly linear.

The third and fourth hypotheses were based on the theorized[13] and hypothesized benefits of framing or qualifying exemplar usage accurately. Six qualifying statements were included in the conditions containing the framing elements that were either "Typical" or "Atypical." Still, these had no measurable influence on reducing or increasing the exemplified support or opposition for internet monitoring. Thus, neither of these hypotheses were supported. Since no interactions between qualifier condition and exemplar condition even approached significance in this study, we reluctantly must suggest that the ability to reduce the impact of disproportionate exemplification through framing is unlikely.

Since we cannot prove the null hypothesis, we must allow that others may find that the way exemplars are framed can improve the ability to use them to communicate accurately. However, it may be necessary to over-exaggerate framing claims beyond professional journalistic norms in order to allow them to have any impact. It is unlikely, then, that journalists would adopt practices of over-emphasizing qualifying statements regarding the typical or atypical nature of exemplars they use.

If indeed our lack of findings presents similar difficulties for future researches, then journalists may be left with no choice but to proportionately distribute the exemplars to represent the relative strengths of various viewpoints or events in society. That is, they will have no choice if they hope to accurately convey information to their readers. Public relations practitioners, on the other hand, will find exemplars to continue to be a powerfully persuasive tool, when used disproportionately to represent the side of an issue for which they campaign.

## APPENDIX

NOTES

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10 Zillmann, "Exemplification Theory: Judging the Whole by Some of Its Parts."

11 Zillmann, "Exemplification Theory: Judging the Whole by Some of Its Parts."

12 The word "against" was not emphasized in the original, but is emphasized here because only the percentages that students indicated were against internet monitoring were used, whi[illegible]e percentages in favor of monitoring were discarded.

13 Zillmann, "Exemplification Theory: Judging the Whole by Some of Its Parts." Zillmann and Brosius, *Exemplification in Communication: The Influence of Case Reports on Issue Perception*.

14 Perry and Gonzenbach, "Effects of News Exemplification Extended: Considerations of Controversiality and Perceived Future Opinion."

15 Zillmann, "Exemplification Theory: Judging the Whole by Some of Its Parts."

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# Media Ownership and 'Bias:'

## A Case Study of
## News Magazine Coverage of the
## 2000 Presidential Election Campaign

Prepared by Craig Flournoy,
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Louisiana State University, 2001

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Louisiana State University, 2001

### Abstract

The hypothesis of this paper is that a publicly held media property—such as *Newsweek* or *Time*—will be more likely to display objectivity in its news coverage than a privately held media company such as *U.S. News and World Report*. To test this, the authors conducted a content analysis of the three major news magazines' coverage of the 2000 presidential campaign. The results of the content analysis of the three magazines support the hypothesis.

## Introduction

In the modern era of presidential campaigns, candidates are no longer directly accessible to the American voter. The voter, therefore, relies on the media to provide an accurate analysis of each candidate's character and platform. In turn, a variety of sources—including print, television, radio and the Internet—bombard voters with news coverage of the candidates. Through these words and images, voters are expected to formulate their perceptions of and their preferences for the candidates. Given the pivotal role that the news media play in the formulation of public opinion, the need for objective coverage of the candidates is evident.

The question of objectivity in news coverage of presidential elections is not a new subject. Throughout the years, Democrats and Republicans alike have made claims of bias. In 1952, Democrats complained about bias against Adlai Stevenson. In addition, Republicans George Bush and Bob Dole claimed that the media treated them unfairly. More recently, questions of objectivity have been raised regarding news coverage of the 2000 presidential election. A study conducted by the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Committee of Concerned Journalists found that between the months of February and June 2000, 76 percent of the coverage of Al Gore focused on one of two themes: that he lies and exaggerates or is tainted by scandal.[1] This study—based on 2,400 newspaper, television, radio and Internet stories—left out one crucial mass media, the news magazine.

Our country's three weekly news magazines—*Time*, *Newsweek* and *U.S. News and World Report*—constitute the focus of this research study. Together, they have a circulation of more than nine million. Numbers like these suggest that the three publications can play an important role in influencing public opinion. Ownership of the of these news magazines ranges from some of the nation's most powerful media companies to enterprises that are far more modest and privately held.

AOL Time Warner, the largest media conglomerate in the world, owns *Time*.[2] *Time*, the nation's oldest news magazine, has a U.S. circulation of slightly more than four million.[3] Its parent company, created by the recent $100 billion merger between America Online and Time Warner, is a media colossus.[4] It combines the world's largest Internet company (AOL) with the country's second-largest cable company (Time Warner).[5] AOL Time Warner publishes 60 magazines with a total readership of 268 million.[6] The company's CNN News Group provides news and entertainment via cable television and the Internet for 76 million subscribers in the United States and more than one billion people in 212 countries and territories.[7] AOL Time Warner is a publicly held corporation.

The Washington Post Company has owned *Newsweek* since 1961.[8] *Newsweek* has a U.S. circulation of 3.2 million.[9] While not nearly as big as AOL Time Warner, the Washington Post Company is a diversified media organization with interests in newspaper and magazine publishing, broadcasting and cable television systems. Like AOL Time Warner, the Washington Post Company is publicly held.

*U.S. News and World Report*, which has a circulation of two million, is privately owned.[10] The principal owner is Mortimer B. Zuckerman, a billionaire developer who amassed his fortune in real estate and then turned his attention to media properties, buying *U.S. News and World Report* in 1984 and later the *New York Daily News*; neither has been financially successful.[11] Zuckerman has involved himself deeply in the operation of *U.S. News and World Report*. He named himself editor-in-chief and is involved in the magazine's daily operations including suggesting stories, reviewing covers and even interviewing subjects.[12] Zuckerman also brought turmoil to the magazine—he went through four editors in five years—and has never spelled out a clear idea of the direction he wants *U.S. News and World Report* to pursue.[13]

Given the circulation numbers of these news magazines and their integral role in some of our nation's largest media groups, it is important to examine the news magazine itself. The news magazine is a unique mass medium in that it operates on a more relaxed time frame than other media. Although the news magazine does have a weekly time deadline, it is more flexible than the deadlines of the evening news and the morning paper. The more flexible deadline provides the news magazine the luxury of examining the week's events and rearranging those events into neatly packaged news. The packaged news is then brought to the homes and workplaces of millions of American voters. As raised by Ben Bagdikian in 1958, the question is, "How often are the bricks of real events reshaped to build a scene more satisfying to the publisher's taste than the scenery of real life?"[14] In other words, how objective is the news coverage of the major news magazines?

The theory of media ownership, developed by J. Herbert Altschull, attempts to answer this question.[15] Altschull contends that the "content of the press is directly correlated with the interests of those who finance the press."[16] Pamela J. Shoemaker and Stephen D. Reese have attempted to refine and extend Altschull's work.[17] They contend that when a publicly held corporation owns a news organization, the primary focus is to make a profit and objectivity is seen as a way of attracting the readers desired by advertisers. When a privately held company owns the news organization, the owner may choose to make profits secondary to an ideological goal, such as promoting a particular political agenda.

The intention of this research project is to build on the work of Altschull, Shoemaker and Reese by applying their theory of media ownership to the nation's three major weekly news magazines. More specifically, this project will address their coverage of the 2000 presidential campaign. This is an area that deserves far more study than it has previously received.

More than 40 years ago, Bagdikian published a scathing 12-part series on the nation's three major news magazines.[18] He found that all three were deeply biased. In his words, "Each of the three magazines has had its particular interests in the news and has tended to fit the presentation of the facts to those interests."[19] Worse, the three news magazines falsely portray themselves as objective and unbiased. Bagdikian wrote, "The bias of the American news magazine is not stated. They all imply they are news."[20] This bias, according to Bagdikian, was particularly evident in their political coverage. He analyzed hundreds of articles and found that each magazine consistently sought to promote a conservative political agenda. Bias also infiltrated the magazines' coverage of political campaigns, according to Bagdikian. As an example, he cites *Time's* reporting on the 1952 and 1956 presidential campaigns. He found overt bias in the space devoted to various officials, the facts selected for inclusion and the tone of the coverage. Bagdikian concluded that *Time's* coverage of the two campaigns represented "the most effective propaganda printed for the benefit of the Republican National Committee."[21]

Bagdikian never suggested why bias appeared to be prevalent in the news magazines in 1958. It is worth noting that at the time, all three were privately owned.

## Literature Review

Scholars who have conducted content analysis reviews of media coverage of previous presidential elections to examine questions regarding balance and fairness have arrived at vastly different conclusions. Many have found that the media gave the presidential candidates equal coverage that was fair and balanced. Stempel and Windhauser analyzed news coverage by 15 major newspapers between 1960 and 1988 and found that the newspapers consistently gave the major contenders equal space.[22]

Six researchers, in fields as divergent as mass communication, genetics and political science, examined news coverage of the 1996 presidential campaign by more than 40 major newspapers and found remarkably balanced coverage in terms of positive and negative information presented.[23] Four of those scholars—Watts, Domke, Shah and Fan—examined news coverage randomly drawn from the NEXIS electronic database for the 1988, 1992 and 1996 presidential election campaigns.[24] They found a slight bias favoring Democrat Bill Clinton in 1992, but found fair and balanced coverage in the other two elections. Despite this, the four researchers found that the public increasingly believes the media have a liberal bias when reporting on the presidential campaign.

Other researchers have found that the media display a distinct bias in political news reporting generally and in presidential campaign coverage specifically. For example, a study by Mantler and Whiteman examined coverage of the 1992 presidential campaign by six of the nation's most important newspapers. It found that four of the six did not provide equal coverage to the major candidates.[25] As mentioned earlier, the Project for Excellence in Journalism and the Committee of Concerned Journalists examined 2,400 newspaper, television, radio and Internet campaign stories in 2000 and found that three-quarters included one of two themes about Gore: either he lies and exaggerates or is connected to scandal. The same study found that the dominant theme in the campaign coverage of George W. Bush is that he is a "different kind of Republican."[26]

There are two terms that are central to this discussion: bias and objectivity. Hackett defines bias as the reporter or a news organization inserting subjective opinion into what is supposed to be a factual account.[27] As an example, Bagdikian cited the headlines on two stories—one about President Eisenhower, the other about Adlai Stevenson—that ran in the same issue of *Time* after the candidates made a joint appearance during the 1956 campaign. The Eisenhower headline was "Ike's Promise" while the Stevenson headline was "Adlai's Pitch." This paper will focus on those instances of bias where the reporter inserted his or her personal opinion into the article without any outside attribution. Objectivity is the opposite of bias. Westerstahl defines it as factual, impartial and balanced.[28] This paper will use the terms "fair" and "balanced" interchangeably with "objective."

Our hypothesis is that a publicly held media property will be more likely to display objectivity in its news coverage of a presidential campaign than a privately held company. Kenney and Simpson employed a similar hypothesis in their examination of the two remaining newspapers in our nation's capitol.[29] Kenney and Simpson used content analysis to test the ownership theory by examining coverage of the 1988 presidential race by the *Washington Post* and the *Washington Times*.

To adequately prove bias, Kenney and Simpson compared media reports to "social reality"—a view of the world that shows what society knows about itself.[30] The study used a list of 30 campaign highlights as a measure of social reality. To determine balance, Kenney and Simpson used "news story generation gates." These rates were determined by dividing the number of stories favoring a political party by the number of events favoring that party. Results showed that the *Times* was most likely to overlook events that helped the Democrats or hurt the Republicans. The results were more clearly identified when the news generation rates were examined. The *Post* published a proportionate number of stories and photographs about events favoring each party, while the *Times* gave far more coverage to the Republicans than the Democrats. Overall, Kenney and Simpson found that the publicly owned *Post* was fair and balanced in its news coverage, while the privately owned *Times* was frequently biased.

Popovich, Moriarty and Pitts studied news magazine coverage of the 1988 presidential campaign.[31] They performed a directional content analysis, but did not apply the ownership theory to their findings. A directional content analysis was used because it allowed the researcher to determine preferential press treatment of one candidate over the other. It also allowed the researchers to determine whether press orientation toward a candidate was positive, negative or neutral. They found that *Time* and *Newsweek* provided the two candidates with balanced coverage: positive and negative statements were equal. However, the authors found that this was not the case with *U.S. News and World Report*. The magazine published mostly positive statements about Republican

George Bush and mostly negative statements about Democrat Michael Dukakis. Thus, Popovich, Moriarty and Pitts concluded, "Only *U.S. News and World Report* showed support for a candidate by giving more positive coverage to Bush than to Dukakis."[32]

As noted earlier, accusations of media bias are not a recent trend. A study of the 1972 presidential campaign conducted by Evarts and Stempel revealed bias in the media coverage of the campaign.[33] This study examined television, news magazine and newspaper coverage of the campaign. Included in the study were the three major broadcast networks, the three major news magazines and six major newspapers. Evarts and Stempel used a symbol coding system, with the sentence being the context unit. Sentences were coded as positive, negative or neutral. Results showed than most of the media studied did not give equal coverage to the candidates. The only media outlets that provided coverage that was not significantly favorable to one candidate over the other were CBS news, the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Los Angeles Times*. For our purposes here it is critical to examine their findings in regard to the news magazines. It was found that *Newsweek* was the most favorable to the Republicans and *Time* was least favorable to the Republicans. *U.S. News and World Report and World Report* was in between the other two news magazines. An interesting finding was that overall the news magazines favored the Republicans, while the television networks and newspapers favored the Democrats. Evarts and Stempel concluded that "the reason for this is that while television and the newspapers dealt with the day-by-day activity of the campaign, the news magazines assessed the campaign over a period of a week. They focused on trends, and most trends were pro-Republican."[34] This statement relates to Bagdikian's assumption about the ability of the news magazine to neatly package the news.

D'Alessio and Allen conducted a meta-analysis of 59 quantitative studies that looked at media bias in presidential election coverage over the past 50 years.[35] The authors examined the studies of newspaper, television and news magazine coverage for three types of bias: gatekeeping bias (choosing stories that favor one party over the other); coverage bias (devoting greater space to coverage of one party at the expense of the other); and statement bias (publishing or broadcasting information that is more favorable to one party than the other). D'Alessio and Allen found no significant bias in newspaper coverage and negligible bias in television and news magazine coverage. According to the authors, the eight studies that examined the news magazines' presidential coverage did show a slight pro-Republican bias. However, most of the news magazine studies examined presidential elections that took place in the 1970s and 1980s.

## Research Questions and Hypothesis

The primary research question for this paper is: Does the type of ownership of a media company play a role in how objectively that news organization reports on a national political campaign? There are other questions this paper also seeks to answer. To the extent that bias does exist in any of the news magazines, does it favor a particular candidate or party? Finally, how does the news magazines' political coverage of the 2000 presidential election compare with what Bagdikian found in the 1950s when media moguls like Henry R. Luce at *Time* and David Lawrence at *U.S. News and World Report* often used their publications as a bully pulpit to promote conservative Republican positions as gospel?

Based on previous studies, the hypothesis is that a media company that is publicly owned—such as *Time* or *Newsweek*—will be more likely to display objectivity in its news coverage of a presidential campaign than a privately held company such as *U.S. News and World Report*.

Scholars are divided on the issue of corporate control and its effect on fairness and balance in news reporting. Some argue that as corporate control increases, the media become more biased. Among the most outspoken adherents of this idea is Bagdikian. He contends that increasing corporate control of the nation's media has caused newspapers, television and radio to place a greater emphasis on pleasing their advertisers rather than serving their audiences.[36] In his words, "The enemy is avarice married to arrogance."[37] Without radical change, according to Bagdikian, there will be "further erosion of the relevant and responsible public information needed to sustain the American democracy."[38]

The work of Schudson, a social historian of journalism, suggests a drastically different picture regarding objectivity, advertising and the profit motive. Schudson argues that objective, fact-based journalism arose in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century as a means to profits.[39] He finds that publications such as the *New York Times* attracted a growing audience of middle- and upper-middle class readers by delivering information-based journalism. That, Schudson finds, proved incredibly profitable, as advertising in the *Times* rose from 2.4 million agate lines in 1897 to 23.4 million agate lines in 1920. In Schudson's scenario, media companies have a vested self-interest in delivering journalism based on facts and largely free of bias.[40]

Other scholars contend that increasing corporate control improves the quality of the organization's news product. Demers surveyed publishers, editors and reporters at more than 200 newspapers, then ranked the publications on a corporate newspaper scale from low to high.[41] He also conducted a survey of public officials representing more than 200 of the cities sampled. He found that the publishers, editors and reporters at the newspapers scoring highest on the corporate scale placed much more importance on such measures as "being the best," "hiring the best employees," "being innovative" and "improving the news product." He also found that public officials in these same cities were more likely to say that the local newspaper was too critical of their performance. Demers concludes that "the corporate newspaper actually places much more emphasis on quality journalism and much less emphasis on profits than its entrepreneurial counterpart."[42]

It is important to remember that the media ownership theory outlined here is not mechanistic. Personal relations between a candidate or an elected official and the media may be such that they override the goals and objectives of the owner. For example, King and Schudson have demonstrated that key members of the Washington D.C. press corps significantly overstated President Reagan's popularity and skill as a communicator during his early years in office.[43] Reagan accomplished this by cultivating reporters and other key people at the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Time* and *Newsweek*. Nor was this a great surprise: According to King and Schudson, Washington reporters use no documents other than press releases in three-quarters of their stories. In Washington's verbal society, reporters repaid Reagan's personal charm with biased positive stories built on little or no factual basis.

## Methodology

The study includes all articles published in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *U.S. News and World Report* from the Labor Day campaign kickoff until the issues dated November 13, 2000, which were released to newsstands the day before the election. Despite the unusual nature of this presidential election, which continued for over a month after the November 9th voting day, no articles were included after the original cutoff date was established. Because votes were already cast, the valence of national media coverage of the aftermath could not effect change.

To meet the researchers pre-established criteria, articles selected from the magazines had to be presented as news; all columns, editorials, letters and opinion pieces were eliminated. In addition, only stories that directly addressed one of the four major party candidates (Al Gore, George W. Bush, Joe Lieberman and/or Dick Cheney) were accepted. Only article text was considered in the content analysis; no headlines, photographs, or captions were included or coded. In total, 101 articles were coded for this analysis. Of these, *Time* accounted for 31, *Newsweek* for 33 and *U.S. News and World Report* for 37.

A coding sheet, which can be found in *Appendix A*, was designed for use with each story included in the analysis. Each article in its entirety was examined for four characteristics: bias in favor of the Republicans, bias in favor of the Democrats, bias that was unfavorable toward the Republicans and bias that was unfavorable toward the Democrats. Coders placed a "0" before the characteristic if it was not present in the text, and a "1" if that characteristic was present. Coders were reminded of several factors to consider in their analysis:

- The nature of an event may favor one party or another, which does not constitute bias.

- Based on the methodology of Kenney and Simpson, four factors of objectivity (as found in Westerstahl's definition) were used:

  1. *Neutrally presented:* Article is free of opinion and sensational language.
  2. *Truthful:* Information reflects the facts of the situation and avoids any intention to mislead.
  3. *Relevant:* Avoids trivial details and emphasizes items of significance.
  4. *Balanced:* Gives more-or-less equal accounts of the alternative points of view (e.g. all quotes supporting one political party should not appear at the beginning of the story with the opposing view at the end).

The three researchers served as coders for this project. Each was well versed in the literature and theory behind this analysis, which allowed for thoughtful reasoning and consideration of each of the articles. The stories were numbered according to magazine, month and issue of publication and order in the magazine. For example, article number 21032 is the second election story in *Newsweek*, October 16, 2000. Once each of the articles was reviewed and numbered, they were randomly distributed to each of the researchers for coding. Each coder worked with roughly one-third of the sample in order to lessen the effects of potential coder prejudices, a technique utilized in Kenney and Simpson's 1993 study. Approximately fifteen percent of the total number of articles were tested for intercoder reliability by using Holsti's coefficient of reliability with 80 percent being preset as the minimum acceptable percentage.[44] Each combination of researchers resulted in a different number: Coder 1 and Coder 2 had an 82 percent reliability, Coders 2 and 3, 80 percent, and Coders 1 and 3, 88 percent.

Once coded for bias, the articles were separated into categories based on whether the focus was on the candidate(s), issues, or any other aspect of the campaigns and elections. It is interesting to note that both *Time* and *Newsweek* tended to run a balanced number of candidate- and issue-centered articles, while *U.S. News and World Report* overwhelmingly concentrated on candidate articles.

| **Category** | ***Time*** **(n=31)** | ***Newsweek*** **(n=33)** | ***U.S. News*** **(n=37)** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Candidates** | 23.5% | 29.4% | 47.1% |
| **Issue** | 45.2% | 38.7% | 16.1% |
| **Other** | 26.3% | 31.6% | 42.1% |

**Table 1: Article Content Categories in the 2000 Presidential Election Campaign by News Magazine**

**Results**

Bias occurred most often in *U.S. News and World Report*. Personal opinion was found in 56.7 percent of its stories. This was about twice the level of bias found in the other two magazines. In *Newsweek*, personal opinion regarding the candidates was found in 30.3 percent of the stories. In *Time*, bias was found in 22.6 percent of the stories.

The bias in *Time* and *Newsweek* was almost invariably against the candidates. There were 14 instances of bias found in *Newsweek*; all 14 were unfavorable toward one or both candidates. There were nine instances of personal opinion found in *Time*; eight of the nine were unfavorable toward one or both candidates. ,In *U.S. News and World Report*, personal opinion was found both in favor of and against the two candidates. There were 24 instances of bias found in *U.S. News and World Report*; of these, 12 were unfavorable toward one of the candidates and 12 were favorable toward one or both candidates.

| News Magazine | Anti-Republican | Anti-Democrat | Pro-Republican | Pro-Democrat | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Time*** | 2 | 6 | 1 | 0 | 9 |
| ***Newsweek*** | 9 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 14 |
| ***U.S. News*** | 5 | 7 | 4 | 8 | 24 |

**Table 2: Instances of Bias For or Against Major Party Candidates by News Magazine in the 2000 Presidential Election**

*Time* and *Newsweek* exhibited a greater level of bias against a particular candidate compared with his opponent, while *U.S. News and World Report* did not demonstrate a significant bias in favor or against any particular candidate. In *Newsweek*, there were nine instances of bias against the Republican candidate compared with five instances of bias that were unfavorable toward the Democratic candidate. In *Time*, there were seven instances of personal opinion that were favorable toward the Republican candidate or unfavorable toward the Democratic candidate compared with two instances of bias against the Republican candidate. In *U.S. News and World Report*, there were 11 instances of personal opinion that were favorable toward the Republican candidate or unfavorable toward the Democratic candidate compared with 13 instances of opinion against the Republican candidate or for the Democratic candidate.

It is interesting to note that a single reporter, Howard Fineman, was responsible for the majority of biased stories that appeared in *Newsweek*. Of the 10 stories with personal opinion that appeared in *Newsweek*, Fineman was the author or co-author of seven or 70 percent. Overall, Fineman wrote or co-wrote 11 of the 33 *Newsweek* articles used in this analysis or 33 percent. In a November 6 article on the eve of the election, Fineman suggests that he is repelled by both candidates.[45] As he writes, "The theme song for this campaign isn't 'Yankee Doodle' or 'Battle Hymn of the Republic,' it's 'Who Let the Dogs Out?'"[46] He says the election represents a low-water mark in American politics, adding Bush and Gore "may set a record for cloying moments."[47]

Because of small cell sizes, identified biases were collapsed into four categories: *pro-republican* (consisting of both pro-republican and anti-democrat biases), *pro-democrat* (pro-democrat and anti-republican biases), *bias against both parties* and *no bias*. These data were then crosstabulated with the article content categories in an effort to determine whether article type affected bias.

| Category | Pro-Republican (n=17) | Pro-Democrat (n=15) | Both Parties (n=6) | No Bias (n=63) | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Candidates** | 21.6% | 25.5% | 9.8% | 43.1% | 100% |
| **Issue** | 9.7% | 3.2% | 3.2% | 83.9% | 100% |
| **Other** | 15.8% | 5.3% | 0% | 78.9% | 100% |

$X^2$ (d.f.=6, $N$=101) = 18.47, $p$<.005

**Table 3: Partisan Bias in News Magazine Articles about the 2000 Presidential Election Campaign by Article Content Category**

*Table 3* shows that candidate-centered articles show a more-or-less equal bias toward each party, although bias is found much more frequently in articles about candidates than those about issues or other elements of campaigns and elections. This is particularly important because *U.S. News and World Report*, the news magazine that was found to contain the most bias, publishes considerably more articles that focus on candidates than either *Time* or *Newsweek*.

The second research question, whether or not a magazine's bias favors a particular candidate or party, is addressed in *Table 4*.

| Magazine | Pro-Republican (n=17) | Pro-Democrat (n=15) | Both Parties (n=6) | No Bias (n=63) | TOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Time*** | 16.1% | 3.2% | 3.2% | 77.4% | 100% |
| ***Newsweek*** | 3.0% | 15.2% | 12.1% | 69.7% | 100% |
| ***U.S. News*** | 29.7% | 24.3% | 2.7% | 43.2% | 100% |

$X^2$ (6, *N*=101) = 19.19, *p*<.004

**Table 4: Partisan Bias in News Magazines' Coverage of the 2000 Presidential Election Campaign**

*Table 4* indicates *Time*'s coverage of the 2000 Presidential campaign favored the Republican Party, whereas *Newsweek* leaned toward the Democrats. It is interesting to note that the magazine with the most instances of bias, *U.S. News and World Report*, did not overwhelmingly favor one party over the other.

## Conclusions

This study examined all of the articles about the 2000 Presidential election campaign published in the three major American news magazines from Labor Day through Election Day in an effort to determine whether or not a relationship exists between media ownership and instances of bias in coverage of political candidates. *U.S. News and World Report*, the only privately owned news magazine included in this study, exhibited large amounts of bias in its stories: 56.8 percent of the total stories examined contained bias either for or against major party candidates. *Time* showed bias only 22.6 percent of the time, and *Newsweek* 30.3 percent of the articles. These results uphold the hypothesis, that publicly held media outlets (such as *Time* or *Newsweek*) will be more likely to display objectivity in its coverage of a presidential campaign than their privately owned counterparts.

The instances of bias found in *U.S. News and World Report* were split relatively evenly between the two parties. This was not the case with either of the other two magazines. *Time*, while having the least amount of bias, tilted towards the Republicans, while *Newsweek* tended to favor the Democratic candidates. These results address whether bias that does exist favors one candidate or party over the other, the second part of our research question. In addition, the biases found in both *Time* and *Newsweek* were overwhelmingly negative; only one example of pro-Republican bias was cited from either magazine, and neither had any articles biased towards the Democrats. What is not clear, however, is whose ideology is being reflected in these articles. As noted in the results section of this study, one reporter—Howard Fineman—was overwhelmingly responsible for the bias found in *Newsweek*'s articles as either the author or co-author of 70 percent of the biased articles. Future research into this area is greatly needed to determine whose biases are making it into the news magazine's articles.

While journalistic bias can still be found in the three major American news magazines, it appears to be less pervasive and ideological when compared to what Bagdikian found in the 1950s. Bagdikian found that an overarching political agenda governed news coverage at each magazine, particularly *Time* and *U.S. News*, and that this, in turn, deeply influenced each publication's political coverage. This was not surprising, given the strong personalities and deeply held political views of the men who then ran the news magazines.

Luce launched *Time* in 1923 followed by *Fortune* in 1930 and *Life* in 1936.[48] He was brilliant and innovative, "one of the giants in the history of American journalism" in the words of the legendary foreign correspondent Theodore H. White.[49] The journalist David Halberstam credits Luce with pioneering the idea of a weekly news magazine.[50] As even Luce's longtime nemesis, William Randolph Hearst once observed, "There can no longer be any doubt that *Time* is the world's outstanding journalistic venture to date."[51] Luce did not use his prize creation to promote fair or balanced reporting. As he told one friend, "Listen, I don't pretend this is an objective magazine. It's an editorial magazine from the first page to the last and whatever comes out has to reflect my view and that's the way it is."[52]

Even star reporters at *Time* found that they crossed Luce at their peril. This was true for White, who was forced to resign his job as a foreign correspondent because Luce repeatedly had his dispatches on the Chinese Revolution rewritten to fit Luce's ideas. As White later recalled, "He was responsible to his balance sheet and his conscience alone, thumbing his nose at advertisers, politicians, correspondents, critics, anyone who stood between him and the view of reality he expected his magazines to follow."[53] John Hersey, another foreign correspondent at *Time*, repeatedly complained about editors who rewrote his stories to fit Luce's policies. He once grew so angry that he fired off a cable to Luce, complaining that his work was "torn from the context… and put into [the] new context of *Time's* editorial bias."[54] Hersey, whose book *Hiroshima* is one of the seminal works of journalism in the 20th century, eventually left *Time* too. He knew there was no changing his boss. As Luce himself once said, "I *am* biased in favor of God, the Republican Party and free enterprise."[55]

Lawrence, who took over *U.S. News and World Report* in 1940 and helped transform it into a major news magazine, could have said much the same about himself. He used *U.S. News and World Report* to promote his views as well as a column that ran five days a week in 270 newspapers across the country.[56] He was a staunch supporter of Senator Joe McCarthy, a fierce anti-Communist and a rabid segregationist; he once ran 18 consecutive columns opposing integration.[57] Lawrence used the news pages of *U.S. News and World Report* to attack any threat to racial segregation, particularly the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 decision striking down state-sanctioned segregation in the nation's public schools.[58] In fact, Lawrence's ideological stranglehold on *U.S. News and World Report* exceeded even Luce's grip on *Time*; a writer for *The Nation* observed in a 1955 profile of Lawrence and *U.S. News and World Report* that "even the gossip columns are slanted."[59]

Today, however, this type of flagrant and pervasive bias cannot be found at any of the nation's three major news magazines. In fact, this study found no evidence of a political agenda at any of the news magazines. Thus, the portrait of the news magazines described by Bagdikian in 1958—one of opinion masquerading as news—does not apply to those same magazines today. It is clear that media ownership does effect content bias, and that the trend towards publicly held media corporations has valued objectivity over personal opinion in news magazines.

## Appendix A
### *Coding Instruction Sheet*

1. **Name:** Enter your (the coder's) name.

2. **Number:** Enter the story number located in the top right corner of the article you are coding. If the article is not the primary story on the page (i.e. text begins on the upper right corner of the page).

3. **Date:** Enter the date *of the story you are coding.*

**Bias:** After reading and considering the *entire article*, please enter the appropriate code based on the following rubric:

- Note that the nature of an event may favor one party or the other, which does NOT constitute bias.
- For the purposes of this project, **bias** is defined as "the reporter or a news organization inserting subjective opinion into what is supposed to be a factual account."
- Please consider the following four factors when determining bias/objectivity:
- *Neutrally presented:* Article is free of opinion and sensational language.
- *Truthful:* Information reflects the facts of the situation and avoids any intention to mislead.
- *Relevant:* Avoids trivial details and emphasizes items of significance.
- *Balanced:* Gives more-or-less equal accounts of the alternative points of view (i.e. all quotes supporting one political party should not appear at the beginning of the story with the opposing view at the end).

4. **Biased in favor of the Republicans**
   0 — This characteristic is NOT PRESENT in the article
   1 — This characteristic IS PRESENT in the article

5. **Biased in favor of the Democrats**
   0 — This characteristic is NOT PRESENT in the article
   1 — This characteristic IS PRESENT in the article

6. **Biased against the Republicans**
   0 — This characteristic is NOT PRESENT in the article
   1 — This characteristic IS PRESENT in the article

7. **Biased against the Democrats**
   0 — This characteristic is NOT PRESENT in the article
   1 — This characteristic IS PRESENT in the article

*Please note:* It is possible that an article will contain elements that are favorable to either both or neither party; please consider each category individually and keep in mind that any combination of "0" and "1" is acceptable.

**Notes:** Enter any information or examples you believe need to be considered in the final analysis of the articles.

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Running head: Media Autonomy

# DO NEWSPAPERS KEEP AUTONOMY IN TIMES OF NATIONAL CRISIS? : A CASE STUDY OF THE IMF CRISIS IN KOREA 1997- 1999

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# DO NEWSPAPERS KEEP AUTONOMY IN TIMES OF NATIONAL CRISIS? : A CASE STUDY OF THE IMF CRISIS IN KOREA 1997-1999

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated whether newspapers keep autonomy in times of national crises based on content analysis. Toward this, it examined the editorials concerning the IMF crisis in Korea that lasted from Nov. 1997 to Oct. 1999 in two Korean newspapers with different ideological positions. The content difference between the newspapers in the editorials relevant to the IMF crisis was in accordance with their ideological stance, which infers that newspapers keep autonomy in times of national crises.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine whether newspapers in a democratic society are able to maintain their autonomy when the nation is faced with a crisis through a case study by the IMF crisis in South Korea. For this purpose, this paper will use content analysis and examine whether newspaper editorials change in a national crisis in terms of ideological position. Ideological freedom is an essential component making newspaper autonomous from government/ power groups. Past research has found that news coverage depends on a newspaper's ideological position (Baek, 1997; Chan & Lee, 1991; Hall, 1977; Yoon, 1989). Newspapers in a democratic society can afford to take a wider range of ideological positions than those in a totalitarian society. Ideologically pluralistic newspapers are competing with each other in a democratic society for domination in the public opinion arena. Based on this relationship between newspaper's ideological position and news coverage, this paper will delineate theoretical linkage among social functions of newspapers, newspaper autonomy, social conflict and social cohesion. After examining mass media's social function from a broad point of view, social control vs. social change, this paper will discuss newspaper autonomy including barriers against the autonomy and then the relationship between newspaper autonomy and external social conflict. Finally, the paper will interpret the relationship by means of media frame.

### Social function of mass media: social change vs. social control

Before discussing social function of newspapers, we need to portray a big picture of social function of mass media because at the macro level, newspapers serve society in cooperation with other mass media. Two prominent views concerning mass communication in a democratic society focus on the processes of social change and social control. The social change perspective views mass media as an agent of social change and portrays the press as an institution that promotes democratic ideas and that acts as a counterpart (Fourth Estate or watchdog) of government and big business (Emery & Emery, 1988). In this view, the mass media should be independent channels for reporting social and political issues and thus the autonomy of mass media as Fourth Estate from the state is a requisite. The autonomy of newspapers in this study refers to how much a newspaper can be free from the restrictions and interruptions of government and power groups in coverage of issues including the processes of information gathering, selection, distribution, interpretation and critics. Gurevitch and Blumler (1977) claim that the greater the autonomy of the media system, the greater will be its tendency to have 'balanced' political information content, in ways which both reflect and preserve its autonomous status. In this sense, we can assume that in a democratically advanced and pluralistic society newspapers presumably possess relatively large autonomy from political power groups.

The contrasting view of mass media as an agent of social control is often drawn from the writings of Karl Marx, who introduced the concepts of ideology and ruling class. During the early part of the 20th century, the Frankfurt school and structural functionalists both advanced a view of the media as a social subsystem that plays a crucial role in the maintenance of the status quo (Viswanath & Demers, 1999). An argument from this view arises that the media are highly responsive to the groups in power, and they build a reality that generally serves the interests of the elite over the masses (Donohue et al., 1973; Gans, 1980; Gitlin, 1979). When newspapers function as an agent of social control they are usually associated with government and power groups. Power groups depend deeply on the mass media to achieve their goals, for example, to get bills passed and to mobilize people. In reverse, the mass media also rely heavily on the government and power groups for the sources of news. In this sense, the relationship between the mass media and the state is less adversarial than symbiotic (Sussman, 1989). Newspapers may be more likely to cooperate with political power groups, especially when they find it legitimate, in a sense, to help the power groups in a certain situation such as a national crisis. Here, we can assume that newspapers might change their ideological position to cooperate with political power groups according to political situation, which might result in self-restriction over the autonomy

There are no mass media systems that are one hundred percent social control oriented or social change oriented. Viswanath and Demers (1999) argue, "[N]either the social control nor the social change perspective alone can accurately describe the complexity of mass media in modern society. Mass media are agents of both control and change, and usually these two processes go hand in hand." (p. 5) They infer that when social situation needs, at the individual institutional level, newspapers will cooperate with power groups, on the other hand, at the societal level, each newspaper will vary at the way and level of the cooperation with the power groups and thus ideological position of a newspaper will still matter.

## Two barriers against media autonomy

There seems to be two barriers restricting newspaper autonomy, the capacity to be self-governing, self-controlling and to be able to act in an independent manner. Considering the relationship between newspaper and government/ power groups discussed in other literature, it is inferred that political environment or the level of democracy would be a barrier of newspaper autonomy. When newspapers are serving a social change function, they are more autonomous from the government/ power groups than when serving as social control agents. The scope of the media's "relative autonomy" from the government is broadly related to the distribution of social power, and it is highly connected with the degree of democratization and a country's style of governance and the manner in which it permits journalists to report and comment (see Yoon, 1989).

Sussman (1989) found the degree of autonomy of newspapers from the government by the style of governance based on the research by Freedom House in 1988; for example, political influence is closely associated with the content of newspapers in 11 countries (or 30 percent of the responding countries) regarded as most free. He also found that twice as many as least-free governments, 22 (or 55 percent of those replying) exert strong political pressures on newspapers. It is expected that newspapers in a democratically advanced and pluralistic society would be more autonomous from government and power groups.

The second barrier of newspaper autonomy stems from social situations. When society is faced with external conflict, social pressure to integrate the members of the society steeply increases resulting in reluctance by newspaper reporters for expressing their true opinions as being different from the mainstream. External conflict may be a binding element between parties that may previously have had in no relation to each other (Coser, 1956; Dahrendorf, 1959). Binding implies formation of exclusive bodies through calling out membership and transforms "bystanders" in the party boundary to "performers" at conflict. Returning to a more general consideration of the effect of conflict upon group cohesion, Coser (1956) contends that conflict makes group members more conscious of their group bonds and increases their participation. A state of conflict pulls the members so tightly together and subjects them to such uniform impulse that they either must get completely along with, or completely repel, one another. Considering Coser's assertion, it is assumed that, within the society, external conflict might reduce the difference between newspapers caused by the institutional characteristics such as policy and strategy.

This study will focus on the second barrier, situational factors. Therefore, we should control political environment to test how much situational factors will actually influence newspaper coverage.

## External conflict vs. internal cohesion

External conflict is somewhat different from internal conflict. Simmel (1955) classifies conflict as internal and external conflict depending on where the conflict comes from. Internal conflict, such as the Los Angeles riots in the aftermath of the trial of police officers accused of beating Rodney King, tends to have a centrifugal effect. Internal dissension tends to splinter various parties in the conflict, ultimately eroding the social consensus. By contrast, external conflicts such as the Persian Gulf War tend to have a centripetal effect. External conflict, which occurs between one social group and other groups, tends to increase cohesion within the group, thus overshadowing internal dissension and building internal consensus among group members (Coser, 1956; Tichenor et al., 1980). Theoretically, this cohesive impact on public opinion leads to social support for elements that are consistent with the consensus and cultivates animosity toward elements perceived as challenging that consensus. The mainstreaming effect of external conflict may manifest itself in a number of ways, including increased support for explicit systemic objectives, confidence in authority, and a disdain for potential vehicles of dissent, including media and nascent internal protest groups.

Public opinion, in times of external conflict, tends to produce, the so-called "rallying effect." According to McLeod et al. (1994), the media and the public surge to support esteemed leaders; they are favorable to the president, national leaders, and their policies, particularly when these policies involve conflicts with foreign countries. For example, President Reagan's popularity reached an all-time high after his invasion of Grenada, as did Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's, following a British victory in the Falkland Island War.

Since external conflict increases internal cohesion while quieting internal conflict, conflict itself may be created, exaggerated, or distorted for political purposes. Coser (1956), therefore, reformulates Simmel's proposition about pseudo conflict and enemy; rigidly organized groups may actually search for enemies with the deliberate purpose or the unwitting result of maintaining unity and internal cohesion. Such groups may actually perceive an outside threat although no threat is present and under conditions not to be discovered, imaginary threats have the same group-integrating function as real threats. Similarly, search for or invention of a dissenter within, so called 'witch-hunting', may serve to maintain a structure, which is threatened from the outside (Coser, 1956). Such scapegoating, or witch-hunting mechanism, will occur particularly in those groups whose structure inhibits realistic conflict within (Coser, 1956). There are shifting gradations between the exaggeration of real danger and the attraction of a real enemy, and the complete invention of a threatening agent.

In general, external conflict tends to increase internal cohesion but the degree of cohesion varies by context. In times of conflict, two factors are involved in intensity of group cohesion: prior internal cohesion, and social stability (see Coser, 1956). According to Coser (1956), prior internal cohesion, the degree of group consensus before the outbreak of the conflict, is indispensable to increase internal cohesion when actual conflict occurs. The relationship between external conflict and internal cohesion does not hold true where internal cohesion before the outbreak of the conflict is so low that the group members have ceased to regard preservation of the group as worthwhile, or actually see the outside threat to concern "them" rather than "us." In such cases, disintegration of the group, rather than increased cohesion, will be the result of outside conflict. Stability of social structure is also important, because if the basic social structure is stable and if basic values are not questioned, cohesion is usually strengthened by conflict through challenge to, and revitalization of, values and goals, which have been taken for granted.

### Media frame and ideology

This study investigates whether public needs for internal cohesion when faced with a national crisis influence newspaper autonomy, and examines content differences of newspaper editorials by means of framing analysis. Content differences in this study will be defined as the variation of interpretation and the order of salience in the coverage of an issue. When many topics are involved in an issue or event, the order of the topics according to its salience would be different by newspaper. For instance, when a high crime rate in a city is attributed to several factors such as negligence of the policemen, low salary of the policemen, shortage of the numbers of the policemen, light punishment on criminals, and 24-hour sale of alcoholic products, the most salient cause reported would be different by newspaper. In this case, we can say content, in terms of salience, is different by newspaper and consequently the crime rate issue is differently framed.

Newspapers have become core systems for the production and distribution of ideology, whether it is for the ruling group or for the challengers, the less powerful group. Newspapers relay more or less patterned images of reality, through what can be called frames. A frame refers to both constitutive elements of an issue around which details are built, and the borders of discourse on the issue (see Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Gitlin, 1979). Frames define which elements of an issue are relevant in public discourse, which problems are amenable to political action, which solutions are viable, and which actors are credible or potentially efficacious. Entman (1993) argues about the relationship between the media frame and the audience's perception of reality:

> Dominant meaning consists of the problem, causal, evaluative, and treatment interpretations with the highest probability of being noticed, processed, and accepted by the most people. To identify a meaning as dominant or preferred is to suggest a particular framing of the situation that is most heavily supported by the text and is congruent with the most common audience schemata. (p. 56)

In a democratically advanced and pluralistic society, newspapers frame and interpret an issue differently. Each newspaper may bring new perspectives, analyses, information, or actors into mainstream discourse, activists and thus create a "frame contest," in which a frame or a newspaper wins "domination." Dominant reality is not fixed but continually contested by alternative or oppositional realities. Frame contests encourage dissident mobilization by increasing the salience of a political issue, calling current policies into question, and suggesting political alternatives (Meyer, 1995). But alternative or oppositional definitions should not violate core hegemonic values or contribute too heavily to radical critique or social unrest (Meyer, 1995). News frames adopted by newspapers would be different from each other and previous studies have found multiple factors associated with the process of frame selection: (1) intervention from or interaction with the government and political institutions (Gurevitch &

Blumler, 1977), (2) influences from those who finance the newspaper (Demers, 1999; Sussman, 1989), (3) news sources (Gans, 1980; Molotch & Lester, 1974; Tuchman, 1978), (4) institutional bureaucracy and journalistic routines (Chan & Lee, 1991; Donohue et al., 1973; Yoon, 1989), (5) norms, values, and ideology (Altheide, 1984; Gans, 1980; Yoon, 1989), and (6) commercialism (Curran, 1977).

Considering Coser's proposition about the linkage between internal cohesion and external conflict, it is assumed that among theses factors affecting the selection of newspaper frames, ideology would not be a matter any more in times of a national crisis because it is most vulnerable at social situation comparing to other factors. However, no research has been done to test whether newspaper ideology is still matter in times of external conflict.

Newspaper ideology is an aggregate of only partially though-out values, which is neither entirely consistent, nor well integrated; and since it changes somewhat over time, it is flexible on some issues. However, once a perspective is built in an institution, it is bound to acquire enduring qualities, even though it is not constant (Chan & Lee, 1991). The media ideology has inertia, tending to continue in the same direction and resisting change unless they are acted upon by significant external or internal forces (Chan & Lee, 1991). Fundamental ideological shifts rarely occur unless there is a collapse of elite consensus, an internal division, or a reconstitution of the power structure, and the like. Chan and Lee (1991) study how media ideology restricts individual journalists. They argue that mass media ideology is reproduced and conveyed to reporters through organizational control primarily through entry recruitment. Reporters are ideologically so congruent with their newspapers that the majority of them do not feel they are subjected to specific or explicit guidelines in the news work. As a practical matter, they need not be told specifically what to write. Social control in the newsroom is a structural and subtle process, with reporters tending to absorb the institutional definitions of the situation and news norms (Chan & Lee, 1991).

As I stated earlier, Coser (1956) argues that external conflict reduces internal conflict and increases social cohesion. Does this argument apply to a newspaper's ideological position? If so, in times of a crisis newspapers will hesitate to express their ideological position to contribute to social cohesion as a social subsystem. Can we say newspapers become homogeneous in their coverage faced with external conflict because they think it will provoke disruption of social order to maintain their ideological position? In other words, will newspapers change, or at least hold to present their ideological position in times of crisis? If not, how do they maintain their ideological position in their news coverage of a national crisis? To answer these questions, contents of two South Korean newspapers' editorials regarding the IMF crisis are examined. For this research to proceed, three conditions have to be satisfied: (1) external conflict, (2) democratically advanced and pluralistic society, and (3) a pair of newspapers with distinct ideological positions.

## Context of the study

The Korean IMF crisis satisfies the three conditions stated above. The crisis began as a type of shortage of foreign currency caused by foreign creditors' swift debt collections and foreign investors' withdrawals from Korean industries, and later developed into a general economic crisis. Finally, the Korean government asked for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to overcome the worst financial crisis ever on November 21, 1997. The IMF's infusion of emergency bailout money–about $57 billion–into Korea surely resulted in a loss of economic sovereignty for Korea, because the IMF directly intervened in all aspects of

Korea's macroeconomic policymaking and industrial restricting process by means of quarterly meetings with Korean government officials.

Although the IMF's demands to Korea were necessary to recover the Korean economy, they consequently resulted in severe repercussions for Korean people. The outcomes followed immediately after the IMF's intervention in Korean economics were massive layoffs, freezing of wages, higher tax rates, suspension of large investment projects, higher interest rates, and extremely low Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. After three months of the IMF's intervention, two million people were unemployed and the Consumer Price Index (CPI) soared by 6.5 percent. Faced with these results, the Korean people were convinced that they had lost their economic sovereignty and encountered a national crisis equivalent to a war (see Table 1).

The Koran legal system has allowed a wide range of press freedoms since the political transition in 1987 achieved by civic movement (Youm, 1996). What has advanced democracy in South Korea was the presidential election in Korea on Dec. 18, 1997 and Daejung Kim, the leader of the oppositonal party- the National Congress for New Politics (NCNP)- was elected. When he took office on Feb. 25, 1998, his presidency seemed to introduce a much broader freedom of expression, because he had been a long-time dissident, regarded as the most liberal leader compared to former Korean presidents and other political rivals. If we consider the state-press relationship in Korea, it was not until Daejung Kim took office in 1998 that the mass meida competed with each other in the market with their own strategy and policy about the IMF crisis.

The two newspapers selected for this study, *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, publish in Korean, are profit seeking and hold ideologically different positions. The ideological positons of the papers are embeded in their attitudes toward the labor movements and the reunification of North and South Korea (see Yoon, 1989; Lee, 1988; Baek, 1993 & 1997; Koh, 1995). As shown in Table 2 *Chosun Ilbo* is considered to be conservative and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* is liberal, in general.

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND SUB-QUESTIONS

The research question is developed based on two assumptions. First, if Coser's argument about internal cohesion in external conflict works for the IMF crisis in Korea, the two newspapers, *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative paper, and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, a liberal paper, would have adopted similar frames concerning the IMF crisis. Second, concerning the pluralistic perspective for media autonomy in a democratic society (see Yoon, 1989; Chan & Lee, 1991; Olien et al., 1989), the two newspapers would have contested with different news frames for more influence on the public. In light of these two assumptions, my research question is as follows:

> RQ: How differently did two major Korean newspapers with opposite ideological positions, *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative paper, and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, a liberal paper, frame the IMF crisis?

Specifically, this paper will seek to answer the following sub-questions through quantitative content analysis:

RQ1: How many different frames did the newspapers provide concerning the causes of the IMF crisis?

RQ2: How many different frames did the newspapers provide concerning the solutions of the IMF crisis?

RQ3: Are the frames for the solutions that each newspaper proposed consistent with each paper's ideological position?

## METHOD

The dependent variable is news frames illustrated by the quantity in editorials. The news frames were analyzed separately with two categories: (1) Causes of the IMF crisis and (2) Solutions for the IMF crisis. The "causes" refer to any mention of cause of the IMF crisis expressed either implicitly or explicitly; or it may be understood as the question: who is responsible for this crisis according to the editorial? For example, an editorial criticizing labor strikes in 1997 went to the cause of "Social disorder caused by labor movement." The "solutions" is about suggestions to overcome the IMF crisis or mitigate the hardship caused by the IMF crisis. For instance, an editorial encouraging "Gold Collecting Campaign"[1] went to the solutions of "Citizens' devotion to the country such as more working, saving, and sharing the hardship caused by the IMF crisis."

The independent variable for this study is the newspaper's ideological position conceptually defined as conservative (or middle-right) and liberal (or middle-left) according to the attitudes in coverage of the issues of North and South Korean reunification and labor movements (see Table 2).

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[1] The Gold Collecting Campaign began in January 1998 to pay the national debts by citizens' donations of gold ornaments such as rings, necklaces, and bracelets.

From each editorial, answers for those two categories were drawn, respectively, and in case one editorial contains more than two different answers for any of two categories, all answers were coded respectively. For instance, an editorial having two causes and four solutions was coded as two items in the causes and four in solutions. To answer the research questions, this study analyzed editorials instead of news stories because politically significant symbols are usually concentrated in the editorial page (Lasswell, 1942).

Coding was done according to the coding instruction (see Coding Instructions in the appendix) and three other students assisted in intercoder reliability checks. Intercoder reliability was calculated for deciding causes and solutions to substantiate the concept of the news frame. The intercoder reliability was 84.7 %, which was computed according to Holsti's (1969, p. 137) formula:

$$\text{Composite Reliability} = \frac{\text{N (average inter-judge agreement)}}{1 + [(\text{N}-1)\text{ (average inter-judge agreement)}]}$$

All issues of each newspaper between Nov. 1997, in which the IMF crisis occurred in Korea, and Oct. 1999 were used (see Figure 1). Although there has been no official declaration of the end of the IMF crisis,[2] many Koreans felt they had escaped the crisis by November 1999 because of the year-long stability in many economic indicators such as price of stocks, interest rates, the exchange rate, and about two million dollar profits in balance of international payments. The selected editorials were then printed to facilitate coding. All editorials were coded from the printed version.

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[2] Officially, the IMF rescue program was terminated on December 3, 2000.

Editorials related to the IMF crisis were collected from the online database in each newspaper's web page (*Chosun*: www.chosun.co.kr and *Hankyoreh*: www.hani.co.kr). The key words used to select an editorial related to the IMF crisis were *editorial and (IMF, reformation, national crisis, economic crisis, or currency problem).* Among chosen editorials, those not related to the IMF crisis were not coded (final N= 477). The editorials related to the IMF crisis contained one of two following topics or both: (1) Cause, result, responsibility, or solution for the IMF crisis and (2) Reform and reconstruction ensuing after the IMF crisis occurred.

After the IMF crisis occurred, reform was demanded in almost all social fields; thus, every issue about reform was related to the IMF crisis, at any rate. While checking intercoder reliability, it was found that the concept of reform confused the coders who tested intercoder reliability. Therefore, the term "reform" was defined before the actual data were coded. Reform in this study includes (1) downsizing the facilities and personnel and (2) change of management and style of control. In these criteria, from individual to systematic or group management level, any mentions about specialization, merger, industry trade, ownership change, separation management from ownership, or layoff was counted as a topic of reform. This concept of reform is applicable to all sectors of society such as banks, companies, government, labors, capital markets, citizens' lifestyle, and *Jaebeols*[3].

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[3] *Jaebeol* is the unique Korean style conglomerate developed by the subsidies from governments seeking the nation's rapid economically competitive power in world trade markets. Since *Jaebeol* tycoons own, manage, and control a group of companies, they are such emperors. The characters of *Jaebeol* style management are multi-itemed like department store, over-investment, and dependence on loan capitals.

## FINDINGS

Causes of the IMF crisis were either explicitly or implicitly expressed in the editorial even though not all editorials mentioned the cause of the crisis. The result of the distribution of the category "Causes" relevant to the first research question may answer the question of who was responsible for this crisis. The statistical test results in Table 3 suggest that the two newspapers were significantly different in frames of the causes of the IMF crisis. The most outstanding difference between *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* (30.2%) and *Chosun Ilbo* (11.8%) is the cause, "The limitation, and failure of the *Jaebeol* system." Another significant difference lies in the cause, "Poor management of financial firms and banks." (*Chosun*: 19.4%, *Hankyoreh*: 11.5%) Other highly ranked choices in both newspapers are "Economic policy failure by Youngsam Kim's administration" (*Chosun*: 18.8%, *Hankyoreh*: 18.8%), "Corruption of people in power" (*Chosun*: 10.0%, *Hankyoreh*: 11.5%), and "Poor management of financial firms and banks." (*Chosun*: 11.2%, *Hankyoreh*: 9.4%) To more clearly illustrate the difference between the two newspapers regarding the causes of the IMF crisis, the "Causes" category was reclassified and therefore, all causes of the IMF crisis referred to in Table 3 were recoded based on the association with the titles of the five new groups in Table 4. The results shown in Table 4 show the differences are still significant between *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative newspaper, and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, a liberal newspaper is still significant. Comparing the two newspapers, *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* is more critical of power groups (*Chosun* 48.2%, *Hankyoreh*: 65.6%), and *Chosun Ilbo* is more unfavorable to less powerful groups (*Chosun*: 13.5%, *Hankyoreh*: 1%). Though both newspapers indicate power groups and economic faults as the main causes of the crisis (*Chosun*: 78.8%, *Hankyoreh*: 86.4%), *Chosun Ilbo* is more focused on the economic realm than is *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* (*Chosun*: 30.6%, *Hankyoreh*: 20.8%).

Regarding the second research question about frames relevant to the solutions, many editorials from both newspapers suggested solutions to resolve the IMF crisis and the results of its analysis in Table 5 show that the newspapers are statistically different from each other. Among 11 solutions in Table 5, the most noted solution is "*Jaebeol* reform." *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, a liberal newspaper, mentions 19.9% of 226 cases, while *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative newspaper, mentions only 6.5% of 460 cases. *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* separates *Jaebeols* from other companies and industries and assigns them to the confronting group with citizens who suffered most from the IMF crisis. The implication from the treatment for *Jaebeol* in *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* is that *Jaebeols* are useless and they should perish as soon as possible. However, *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* agreed with *Chosun Ilbo* that the political and economic sectors need restructuring. In contrast with "*Jaebeol* reform," the solution, "Reform in governmental organizations" is ranked first in *Chosun Ilbo* (11.3%), while it is fifth in *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* (8.8%). These results can be understood in the newspaper's relationship with a political party (see party propensity in Table 2). *Chosun Ilbo* is pro-Hannara; a conservative party in which President Youngsam Kim was the leader and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* is pro-NCNP; a liberal party in which President Daejung Kim is the leader. It is inferred that owing to this party propensity, *Chosun Ilbo* is more critical of the Daejung Kim's administration and demands reform in the government sector. Let's avert our attention to government affiliation. *Chosun Ilbo* was pro-government, while *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* was anti-government during Youngsam Kim's administration, which attitudes of the newspapers are the opposite to the results shown in Table 4. Considering the changes in attitude towards the two governments and consistence towards the parties, it is concluded that Korean newspapers consistently have kept their attitudes towards the parties during the IMF crisis, but their attitude towards the government has been switched since

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the political transition in 1998. The next three solutions for *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* are "Industry structure and banking system reform led by government" (11.5%), "Punishment for corruption" (10.2%), and "Government's and owner's efforts for employment." (9.3%) Conversely, *Chosun Ilbo* exhibits a totally different ranking order. The first place is "Reform in governmental organizations" (11.3%) and the next are "Industry structure and banking system reform led by government" (9.6%), "Policies and market intervention at the macro economics level" (8.7%), and "Good handling of foreign powers." (7.2%)

Though Table 5 clearly exhibits some differences between the two newspapers concerning the solutions for the IMF crisis, it does not display the relationship between the solutions and the ideological positions of the newspapers. Therefore, Tables 6, 7, and 8 were built based on Table 5 to demonstrate the relationship. In Tables 6, 7, and 8, we should pay special attention to three aspects: the first target of reform in power groups, the main player of economic reform, and the attitude for citizens.

Table 6 refers to the most important and urgent reform needed to escape the IMF crisis proposed in the editorials and shows significant differences between the two newspapers. From the viewpoint of *Chosun Ilbo,* reform in the economic sphere is more important than political power groups, but *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* is the opposite. In light of this result, it is concluded that *Chosun Ilbo* has economics-centered frames, while *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* has politics-centered frames.

Table 7 illustrates significant differences between the two newspapers pertaining to economic reform. *Chosun Ilbo* maintains that industrial reform should be executed by individual companies, while the government's role must be restricted only to assisting a company's individual reform plan. In contrast, *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* contends that the government should lead industrial reform with compulsion, punishment, and subsidies. In brief, *Chosun Ilbo* is favorable to free market economics, but *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* is a government-involved economics supporter.

As can be seen in Table 8, *Chosun Ilbo* emphasized citizens' sacrifice other than welfare for the citizens to persevere through the IMF crisis, while *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* published editorials about welfare for the citizens (69% of 42 cases) approximately twice more than the citizens' sacrifice (31% of 42 cases). The statistical test results show the attitudes of the two newspapers for the citizens are significantly different. In sum, considering the relationship with power groups and the newspaper industry in Korea (see Kang, 1992; Kim, 1994; Jeong, 1998), we may state that *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* is a pro-citizen paper, while *Chosun Ilbo* is a pro-establishment, highly ranked in socioeconomic status (SES), paper.

## DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to explore two newspapers' ideological positions in times of a national crisis and thus, during the IMF crisis the editorials of two Korean newspapers having opposite ideological positions from each other were analyzed. The results of quantitative content analyses revealed that the ideology of a newspaper still matters in times of national crisis in terms of framing.

*Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative newspaper, and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, a liberal newspaper displayed significant differences in their frames. More specifically, what causes and solutions concerning the IMF crisis were emphasized in the coverage of the IMF crisis was clearly distinguished between the newspapers. The different salience between the newspapers shows a newspaper's autonomy over the situational pressure. Therefore, even though there were some monolithic trends concerning the IMF crisis, the newspapers held autonomy by means of differential frames, so that they continued to compete with each other to obtain domination in the public arena on the basis of these differences.

As the representatives of opposite ideological positions, *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative newspaper, and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, a liberal newspaper competed in the public opinion arena and market with their frames deeply related to their ideological positions in coverage of the IMF crisis. Though the newspapers had a consensus of why the IMF crisis occurred and what was needed to overcome the crisis, they were distinct in the coverage of causes and solutions in terms of salience. In other words, they set different frames from each other. These differences in frames between *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* resulted from their different ideological stance.

*Chosun Ilbo*'s frame would attribute to view the IMF crisis as an economic crisis and induce public sentiment and opinion about reform in the economic field by companies and banks other than the government. In addition, for the stability of power groups, *Chosun Ilbo*, compared to *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, paid less attention to *Jaebeol* tycoons, Youngsam Kim's administration or Hannara Party, a conservative party, while indicating more responsibility and blame for the IMF crisis on the less powerful groups (see Table 4).

*Hankyoreh Sinmoon*'s frames would attribute to raise public opinion to transfer power resources from power groups to the groups that are currently less powerful, after defining the IMF crisis as a social structure problem. To put it concretely, compared with *Chosun Ilbo*, *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* blamed the current power groups more for the occurrence of the IMF crisis (see Table 4), especially *Jaebeols* and Youngsam Kim's administration. Instead, *Hankyoreh*

*Sinmoon* expressed concern over less powerful groups' welfare more (see Table 8): for example, social welfare, tax reform, redistribution of wealth, and government's and owner's efforts for more employment.

The frames of *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* are in accordance with their ideological positions. *Chosun Ilbo*'s ideological positions are conservative in politics, laissez faire in economics, and pro-Hannara Party, and the results of editorial analysis showed that the paper delivered the ideas of social structure stability, economic autonomy from the government, and pro-conservative party in times of the IMF crisis by making salient some topics related to the crisis.

On the other hand, *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*'s ideological positions are liberal in politics, social welfare-oriented in economics, and pro-National Congress for New Politics Party (NCNP) and it delivered different ideas from *Chosun Ilbo*. *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* emphasized power groups' responsibility and reforms in power structure and indicated a propensity towards the liberal party, which is harmonious with its ideological position. In conclusion, the newspapers kept their ideological positions in times of national crisis.

We should be able to answer how the newspapers' autonomy and variance were possible in Korea in times of a national crisis if we refer to Coser's argument about the relationship among external conflict, internal cohesion and the role of the mass media as a social maintenance subsystem. The degree of social cohesion is dynamic and cyclic, and it remains low in normal times and high in conflict, and the cycle of social cohesion declines after it reaches the top and vice versa. During the study span, from Nov. 1997 to Oct. 1999, the two newspapers mainly played a part in the declining stage, just after the top stage of the cohesion cycle, so they did not need to dedicate to increase internal cohesion. Some successful national campaigns showed that the intensity of internal cohesion of the Korean people reached the top in the cycle in early 1998, such as the "Gold Collection Campaign," "A Dollar Saving Campaign," and "Boycott of Imported Products Campaign." The rapid arrival to the top of the cohesion cycle in Korea resulted from the high degree of prior internal cohesion within the Korean people. As Coser (1956) indicates, the degree of prior internal cohesion is in direct proportion to the degree of integration by external conflict.

In sum, the two Korean newspapers did modify their ideological positions to avoid disrupting public opinion. Actually, they did not have a chance to do so because of the high degree of prior internal cohesion of the Korean people. The case of the Korean IMF crisis requires expanding on Coser's (1956) proposition about internal cohesion in times of external conflict as it applies to media coverage. We proposes that the degree of prior internal cohesion is in direct proportion to the speed at which the members of the group arrive at the top of the cycle in accordance with the intensity of the cohesion.

As can be seen in the above paragraphs, the mass media in Korea did not modify or abandon their ideological position in times of the national crisis; instead, they actively contested with different frames. Therefore, we can say that if a democratically pluralistic system is guaranteed, no matter what the situation is, the mass media deliver their ideology in the coverage of public affairs, to some extent. However, this does not mean that the mass media in a democratic society are totally ideologically free. *Chosun Ilbo*, a conservative paper, and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*, a liberal paper, had restructured their attitudes for the government in their coverage of the incumbent president. *Chosun Ilbo* was less critical of Daejung Kim, but *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* was more supportive of him after he took office. This illustrates that the mass media were still affected by the political situation as Yoon (1989) and Chan and Lee (1991) argue, but this restriction did not harm intrinsic media autonomy. Rather, it impacted on the scope of expression of their ideology. This result reaffirms the proposition that mass media are neither totally autonomous from, nor totally subservient to, the established power (Viswanath & Demers, 1999).

When discussing media autonomy, we must consider another aspect, "journalist" autonomy (see Chan & Lee, 1991), which refers to autonomy at the individual level. The results of this study showed a consensus in the editorials of the two newspapers with each other in terms of frames and the consensus was in accordance with each paper's ideological position. These results can be inferred differently at the organizational level from the individual level. The consensus implies that the journalists were bound to a monolithic or dominant perspective within the institution. As I stated earlier, the two Korean newspapers' ideological positions were adopted by their owners. Chan and Lee (1991) claim that the news media ideology is reproduced and diffused out to all employees primarily through entry recruitment, and the employees tend to absorb the institutional definitions of the situation and news norms, though as a practical matter, they need not be told specifically what to write or say. In light of this, autonomy of mass media from power group or social structure does not guarantee journalist autonomy, which would be achieved over the owner's and institutional restrictions.

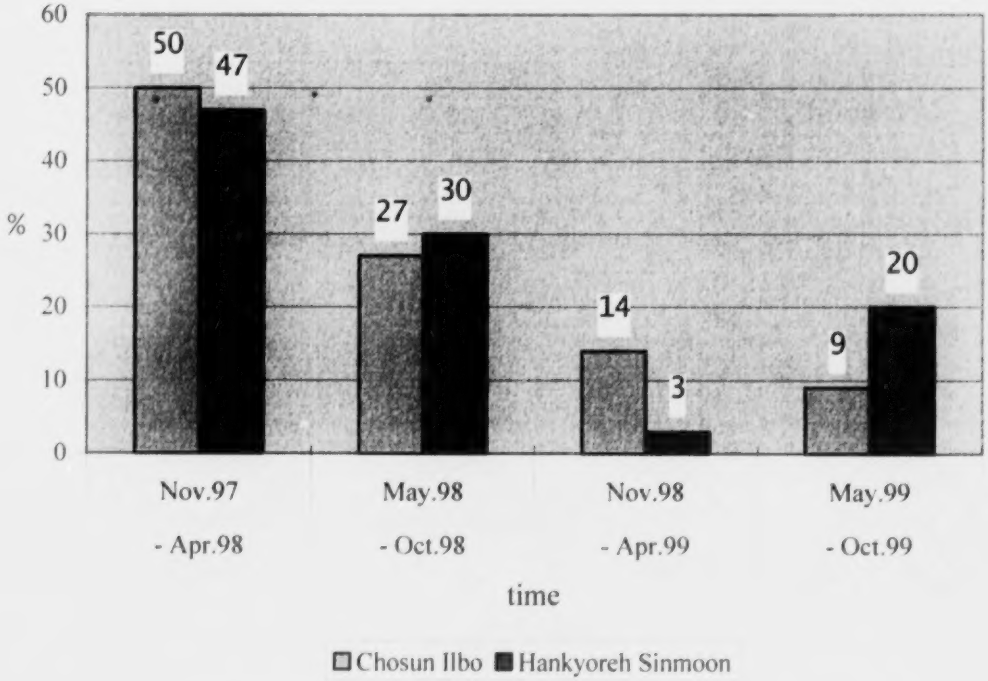
## Limitation and segmentations for further studies

*Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* were selected for this study because of their distinguished ideological positions and sizeable circulation. However, more newspapers would be better to cover a variety of ideological positions. Especially *Daehan Maeil Sinmoon* and *Donga Ilbo* should be analyzed along with *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*. If these four newspapers were arranged in a row according to the order of their conservativeness, the order would be as follows: *Daehan Maeil Sinmoon* first, followed by *Chosun Ilbo*, *Donga Ilbo*, and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*.

This research is a cross-sectional study; yet the topic, mass media ideology in times of national crisis, can also be measured through a longitudinal study, for example, mass media ideology in the IMF crisis in Korea can be studied by comparison of the period of Youngsam Kim's administration with the period of Daejung Kim's administration. More interesting results would be expected when the period is divided by four: Youngsam Kim's administration before and after the IMF crisis occurred, and Daejung Kim's administration during the IMF crisis and after the IMF crisis is over. In these four periods, the degree to express ideological differences between newspapers would be more dynamic.

Another fruitful approach is to do a comparative study involving other nations that were affected by the "Asian Economic Crisis": Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Comparing Korea with Malaysia could be instructive as the reactions to the IMF rescue program contrasted sharply between the two nations. Malaysia did not accept the IMF directions and demands, including the high interest rate and low growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while Korea yielded its economic sovereignty to the international power group with little resistance. Since the national consensus to international power groups was different between the two countries, in the coverage of the IMF crisis, the newspapers of each country, as a social maintenance subsystem, would be distinctive. This study is expected to reveal how much public opinion or national consensus affect ideological positions of newspaper in a democratically advanced and pluralistic society.

Figure 1. The percentage of editorials of the IMF crisis by newspaper



N = 477 (*Chosun*: 297, *Hankyoreh*: 180)

Table 1. Three indexes for the Korean economy around the IMF crisis

| Date | *Interest Rate | **KOSPI | ***Currency Exchange Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| 6/28/97 | 11.72 | 746.89 | 888.1 |
| 8/1/97 | 11.90 | 726.12 | 892.0 |
| 9/1/97 | 12.16 | 695.37 | 902.0 |
| 10/1/97 | 12.60 | 647.11 | 924.8 |
| 11/1/97 | 12.00 | 470.79 | 964.6 |
| 12/1/97 | 15.10 | 407.86 | 1163.8 |
| 1/1/98 | 30.89 | 385.49 | 1680.0 |
| 2/1/98 | 18.50 | 567.38 | 1572.9 |
| 3/1/98 | 20.50 | 558.98 | 1640.1 |
| 4/1/98 | 18.28 | 481.04 | 1387.0 |
| 5/1/98 | 17.70 | 421.22 | 1336.0 |
| 6/1/98 | 17.82 | 332.03 | 1407.0 |
| 7/1/98 | 16.00 | 297.88 | 1373.0 |
| 8/1/98 | 12.30 | 343.33 | 1230.0 |
| 9/1/98 | 11.70 | 310.16 | 1230.0 |
| 10/1/98 | 11.90 | 310.33 | 1390.0 |
| 11/1/98 | 11.90 | 305.73 | 1391.0 |
| 12/1/98 | 9.25 | 451.88 | 1246.0 |

* Korean standard of interest rate is three-year maturity bonds

** Korean Stock Price Index

*** The value of one USD in Korean Won

Table 2. Comparison between *Chosun Ilbo* and *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*

| Aspect | *Chosun Ilbo* | *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* |
|---|---|---|
| Owner | A family | A group of liberal former journalists |
| Politics | Conservative | Liberal |
| Economics | Laissez faire | Social welfare-oriented |
| Koreas' reunification | Talks precluding communists | Talks with any group |
| Party propensity[1] | Pro- Hannara Party[2] (a conservative party) | Pro-National Congress for New Politics (NCNP)[3] (a liberal party) |

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[1] This category was added to the original comparison in Baek (1993), based on the researcher's interview with Dr. Youngchul Yoon in the Department of Communication in Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea. Dr. Yoon studied media ideological shift during political transition (see Yoon 1989 in the reference list).

[2] President Youngsam Kim, during his administration, was the leader of the New Korean Party, which later changed its name to Hannara Party.

[3] President Daejung Kim has been leading this party from 1996 up to now.

Table 3. Causes of the IMF crisis

| Causes | *Chosun Ilbo* | | *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| Corruption of people in power | 17 | 10.0 | 11 | 11.5 |
| Economic policy failure by the government | 32 | 18.8 | 18 | 18.8 |
| Improper prescription by creditor nations and the IMF | 6 | 3.5 | 8 | 8.3 |
| Poor management and financial structure of companies | 19 | 11.2 | 9 | 9.4 |
| Poor management of financial firms and banks | 33 | 19.4 | 11 | 11.5 |
| The limit and failure of the *Jaebeol* system | 20 | 11.8 | 29 | 30.2 |
| Other | 43 | 25.3 | 10 | 10.4 |
| Total | 170 | 100.0 | 96 | 100.0 |

Chi Square: 23.495 d.f: 6 $p < .01$

Table 4. Reanalysis of the causes with groups

| Cause | *Chosun Ilbo* | | *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| Power groups' faults | 82 | 48.2 | 63 | 65.6 |
| Less powerful groups' faults | 23 | 13.5 | 1 | 1.0 |
| Pure economic faults | 52 | 30.6 | 20 | 20.8 |
| International relationships | 7 | 4.1 | 10 | 10.4 |
| Other | 6 | 3.5 | 2 | 2.1 |
| Total | 170 | 100.0 | 96 | 100.0 |

Chi-Square: $20.4^{a}$ d.f: 4 $p < .001$

a. 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.89.

Table 5. Solutions for the IMF crisis

| Solutions | *Chosun Ilbo* | | *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| Cooperation among politicians and officials | 25 | 5.4 | 7 | 3.1 |
| Cooperation with the government | 24 | 5.2 | 8 | 3.5 |
| Expansion in social welfare | 9 | 2.0 | 8 | 3.5 |
| Good handlings of foreign powers | 33 | 7.2 | 7 | 3.1 |
| Government 's and owner's efforts for employment | 12 | 2.6 | 21 | 9.3 |
| Industry and banking system reform led by government | 44 | 9.6 | 26 | 11.5 |
| *Jaebeol* reform | 30 | 6.5 | 45 | 19.9 |
| Policies and market interventions at macroeconomics | 40 | 8.7 | 4 | 1.8 |
| Punishment for corruption | 16 | 3.5 | 23 | 10.2 |
| Reform in governmental organizations | 52 | 11.3 | 20 | 8.8 |
| Others | 175 | 38.0 | 57 | 25.2 |
| Total | 460 | 100.0 | 226 | 100.0 |

Chi Square: 79.555[a] d.f.: 10 $p < .001$

[a] a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.60.

Table 6. Frequency of the first target of reform in the power groups

| | Economic power | Political power | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Chosun Ilbo* | 52 (72%) | 20 (28%) | 72 (100%) |
| *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* | 30 (40%) | 45 (60%) | 75 (100%) |
| Total | 82 (56%) | 65 (44%) | 147 (100%) |

Chi Square: 15.36 d.f: 1 $p < .001$

Table 7. Frequency of the main player of economic reform

| | Government | Individual company | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Chosun Ilbo* | 44 (63%) | 26 (37%) | 70 (100%) |
| *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* | 25 (83%) | 5 (17%) | 30 (100%) |
| Total | 69 (69%) | 31 (34%) | 100 (100%) |

Chi Square: 4.11 d.f.: 1 p < .05

Table 8. Frequency of attitudes for the citizens

| Newspaper | Citizens' sacrifice | Welfare for citizens | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Chosun Ilbo* | 51 (71%) | 21 (29%) | 72 (100%) |
| *Hankyoreh Sinmoon* | 13 (31%) | 29 (69%) | 42 (100%) |
| Total | 64 (56%) | 50 (44%) | 114 (100%) |

Chi Square: 17.21 d.f: 1 $p < .001$

## CODING INSTRUCTIONS

Please read all the instructions carefully before you begin coding. You will be reading each editorial at least two times. If you have any questions as you work, please ask. It will be helpful to read these instructions before you begin each coding session. Use one coding sheet per editorial.

Stop 1: Editorial identification:

1) Identification number of the editorial:

You can find a three-digit number at the top of right side of the first page of each editorial, e.g., 001, 014, 236.

2) Enter the code of the newspaper:

1 = The *Chosun Ilbo* 2 = The *Hankyoreh Sinmoon*

3) Date of the editorial (six digit number)

Enter the year first, followed by the month and date. For example, if the date of the news story is December 6, 1998, enter it as 981206.

4) Write the editorial's headline in the space provided.

Step 2: Causes of the crisis

Q. What causes, if any, are either explicitly or implicitly expressed in the editorial or who is responsible for this crisis according to the editorial?

601. Economic policy failure by Youngsam Kim administration.
602. NNoncooperation to pass reform bills for labor and bank regulations by the parties out of power
602. All politicians who worked for party interests not for that of the public and the country.

603. The limit and failure of Korean development style[i] aiming at economic growth led by government and a few conglomerates.
604. Corruption of people in power
605. The limit and failure of jaebeol system
606. Poor management of financial firms and banks
607. Poor management and financial structure of companies
608. Social disorder caused by labor movement
609. Social disorder caused by student movement
610. Foreign investors' speculation
611. Improper prescription and reaction by Creditor nations and the IMF
612. Some citizens' over-consumption, lavishness, and tax dodging
613. All members of the country
699. Other (write what it is)

Step 3: Solutions for the crisis

Q6. What is the editorial suggesting us, if any, to overcome or alleviate the hardship resulting from the IMF crisis?

700. Change of government's finance policy
701. Government's positive policies and market interventions at macro economics level such as foreign exchange, stock, interest markets
702. Cooperation among politicians and high ranked officials for the sake of the country
703. Reform in governmental organizations, political world, public service personnel
704. Increase export
705. Control import
706. Industry structure and banking system reform led by government
707. Jaebeol reform
708. Self-help by individual companies and banks such as downsizing or debt redemption

709. Reducing cost by layoffs
710. Harmonious relationship between labors and owners promoted by labors' cooperation to the owner
711. Harmonious relationship between labors and owners promoted by government 's and owner's efforts for more employment
712. Attract foreign capital and wider open domestic capital markets to foreign investors
713. Hold to open capital market to foreign investors or gradual open process
714. Citizens' devotion to the country such as more working, saving, and sharing the hardship caused by the IMF crisis
715. Regain international confidence by good handlings in the relationship with the foreign powers such as the IMF and creditors
716. Reform in the press and the education
717. Change society's opinion for the future more positively, such as "we will rebound"
718. Tax reform and redistribution of wealth
719. Cooperation between government and other social subsystems
720. Punishment for corruptions of officials, bankers, businessmen and politicians
721. Changes of attitude and prescription for Korea from IMF and creditors
722. Expansion in social welfare
723. Fostering qualified companies by subsidy
799. Others (write what they are)

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[1] Korea was a standard case of Asian nation-building, in which the government set developmental goals, told the banks to fork out the necessary cash and let industry grow willy-nilly.

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**Thank you**

# Agenda Setting & Attitudes: An Exploration of Political Figures During the 1996 Presidential Election

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Presented to the Mass Communication & Society Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication for the 2001 annual conference held in Washington, D.C.

* The author would like to thank Dr. Cindy Christen for her helpful comments on earlier drafts on this paper. The author would also like to acknowledge research assistant Pei Chun Ho for her assistance in collecting and entering data for this project and Dr. Maxwell McCombs for his helpful insights.

# Agenda Setting & Attitudes: An Exploration of Political Figures During the 1996 Presidential Election

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the attitudinal consequences of agenda setting on political figures during the 1996 presidential election. In particular, the analysis probes the relationships among media coverage, public salience, and the strength of public attitudes towards a set of 11 political figures. Using literature from agenda setting, attitude strength, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, we explore such relationships. Findings indicate that increased media attention to political figures is correlated with higher levels of public salience and attitude strength. Further, the data suggest that these linkages vary according to levels of audience motivation. Finally, the implications of the results are discussed.

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## Introduction

Throughout its theoretical history, agenda setting research has primarily emphasized how mass media, policy makers, and the public interact and influence one another to affect issue salience.[1] In addition, a body of literature in this paradigm has also considered how candidate images are constructed and prioritized in public opinion,[2] expanding the original agenda setting model to include multiple "objects" in the news. A shared quality of all these investigations has been their common convergence on people's cognitions. Indeed, little attention has been dedicated to the attitudinal consequences of agenda setting. The scant work analyzing attitudes has concentrated on candidate images and is usually limited to probing how the salience of *public issues* influences attitudes towards candidates.[3] While helpful, such research supplies an incomplete picture of news impact because it misses the more central question of how sheer media attention towards political figures *themselves* impacts public attitudes towards those same political figures. Consequently, in an attempt to push the boundaries of current agenda setting scholarship, this project's primary purpose is to examine the linkages among media attention, public salience, and the strength of public attitudes towards political figures. Borrowing from literature on agenda setting, attitude strength, and the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, we tackle this fundamental empirical question.

## Literature Review

### *Agenda Setting*

Traditionally, agenda setting research on attitudes towards political candidates has scrutinized how media coverage of various public issues affects opinions about candidates. This is best illustrated in the research on priming as established by Shanto Iyengar and his associates.[4] The notion of priming suggests that media attention towards political issues shapes how governmental leaders are evaluated in public opinion.[5] For example, if the media choose to highlight the economy over a certain span of time, politicians are more likely to be evaluated based on their performance on that issue than on any other. In those situations, reporting about strong economic performance should yield positive evaluations, while reporting about weak economic performance should engender negative evaluations.

Priming investigations offer perhaps the most far-reaching area of agenda setting scholarship that has examined public attitudes. Although some may view these research areas discretely, many scholars view priming as a consequence of agenda setting.[6] placing them under the same conceptual umbrella. One underdeveloped area in priming research has been the limited empirical work investigating how media attention towards political figures influences public attitudes towards those same figures — an attitudinal implication that agenda setting seems to at least tacitly imply. After all, Mutz[7] cleverly articulates that the conventional question gauging public salience ("what is the most important problem facing the nation today?") has affective overtones in it. In short, the term "problem" should not only secure purely cognitive responses from audiences.

In its classical definition, agenda setting has examined how the salience of "objects" in the news is transferred from the press to the public.[8] Of course, the two principal types of objects investigated are issues and candidate images, but others have also been probed, including public relations materials [9] and foreign countries.[10] "Social learning" is said to take place where mass media, in a sense, teach individuals which topics in the news deserve more consideration and scrutiny than others.[11] Evidence for the social learning model of agenda setting is afforded by Becker and McCombs[12] who, in a longitudinal study of the 1976 presidential campaign, found that the correspondence between the media and public agendas of issues increased from a +.64 correlation to +.83 in just one month's time, reflecting a great degree of voter learning from news coverage.

More contemporary literature has transcended beyond object salience to also explore what has been called "attribute" salience. Objects, in this context, are thought of in the same spirit as attitude objects in psychology. The basic premise behind attributes is that objects in the news have various elements that comprise their images. For example, political candidates, as objects, retain several attributes that distinguish them from one another, such as their personality traits, issue positions, and qualifications. Cumulatively, researchers have argued that the salience of objects is the "first-level" of agenda setting, and the salience of attributes is the "second-level" of agenda setting.[13]

Second-level research, in particular, has underscored the need for a more systematic perusal of the attitudinal outcomes of agenda setting. Specifically, McCombs and Estrada[14] declare that Bernard Cohen's famous summary of the media's power in public opinion could be reformulated to state "the media may not only tell us what to think about, they may also tell us ***how and what to think about it***, and even *what to do about it*". Further, McCombs, Lopez-Escobar, and Llamas[15] found that audience descriptions of certain candidate attributes strongly corresponded to perceived levels of candidate *affect*. Similar to first-level research on attitudes, most of the second-level scholarship has also been conducted on political candidates.[16]

*Attitude Strength*

Perhaps the greatest shortcoming of agenda setting studies on attitudes (not to mention general media effects scholarship on attitudes) has been the primary emphasis on *attitude change* as the only substantial attitudinal outcome that can be attributed to news influence.[17] It is our contention that this is not the only facet of attitudes that researchers should be inquiring about when exploring the attitudinal impact of mass media, especially with respect to agenda setting, which deems the *volume* and *prominence* of coverage to be the critical variables behind media influence, not just *valence*. Instead, we postulate that the main influence of agenda setting on attitudes is in the development and structuring of public opinion. The concept of *attitude strength* is paramount in locating some of these aspects.

A multidimensional construct, attitude strength is broadly defined as those features and qualities that distinguish strong attitudes from weak ones.[18] Some of these features include attitude extremity, attitude importance, attitude certainty, and prior knowledge.[19] Drawing from the concept, we can begin to delineate some specific attitudinal consequences that can be ascribed to the agenda setting process. For example, a general assumption of the theory is that audiences learn about, think about, and prioritize the information they receive from the news in proportion to the amount of attention that information is apportioned in media content. If this attention is presumed to increase thinking and learning then, a logical consequence that follows is that people should begin to reveal and uncover stronger attitudes as press attention intensifies. This development of stronger attitudes could manifest itself in many ways, but three we highlight are attitude formation, attitude dispersion, and attitude polarization.

By attitude formation, we simply refer to the emergence of any attitudes towards objects whether they are positive, neutral, or negative. By attitude dispersion, we refer to the emergence of non-neutral attitudes. Finally, by attitude polarization, we mean attitudes that are highly positive or negative towards their referent objects — particularly those that reach the far ends of affect scales. Let's consider a brief hypothetical case to illustrate some of these attitudinal dimensions. For example, on a 10-point scale of affect, the amount of people that fall anywhere between one and 10 would be demonstrating attitude *formation*, as long as the scale has at least a "don't know" category for other responses. Since five would function as our midpoint, all the people falling between one and four and between six and ten would represent *dispersed* attitudes. Finally, the amount of people responding one and 10 (summed) on the scale would be unveiling *polarized* views.[20]

Several studies support the theorizing that mass media might sway public attitudes in these various ways. For example, Erber, Hodges, and Wilson[21] examining data on attitudes towards Ronald Reagan, reported statistically significant positive correlations between media exposure and knowledge ($r$=.31) and between media exposure and attitude extremity ($r$=.19). Further, Sapiro and Soss[22] found robust relationships among public attention to media coverage of the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill congressional hearings, the perceived salience of various media frames related to those hearings, and extreme attitudes toward Hill and Thomas. Kiousis[23] found that as media coverage of presidential candidates ascended, the amount of people holding non-neutral attitudes about candidates also increased. Finally, Zaller[24] reported that as political awareness of the Vietnam War increased among audiences, the number of people who said they had "no opinion" about the war declined.

In addition to this direct evidence indicating media influence on strengthened attitudes, a plethora of investigations buttress the position that any impetus (e.g., mass media) which increases thinking could also be expected to stimulate stronger attitudes.[25] Tesser, Martin, and Mendolia[26] encapsulate the relationship between thinking and strengthened attitudes when asserting that "thought, then, tends to make evaluations more extreme, more accessible and more enduring." As a result, we generally expect that as mass media attention to objects rise, the number of people who have any attitudes, non-neutral attitudes, and polarized attitudes should also grow. Based on the above rationale, the following hypotheses are advanced:

*H1: Media attention to public figures will be positively correlated to the amount of people who recognize those same public figures (salience).*

*H2: Media attention to public figures will be positively correlated to the amount of people who hold attitudes (positive, negative, and neutral) about those same public figures (formation).*

*H3: Media attention to public figures will be positively correlated to the amount of people who hold non-neutral attitudes about those same public figures (dispersion).*

*H4: Media attention to public figures will be positively correlated to the amount of people who hold polarized (positive and negative) attitudes about those same public figures (polarization).*

### *Elaboration Likelihood Model*

Although pulling from the agenda setting and attitude strength literature begins to provide a glimpse of how attitudinal outcomes might flow from agenda setting, the picture is unclear because the overwhelming amount of research in this area has investigated public thinking, not valence. To fill in the gaps, we consider the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion,[27] which allows us to further flesh out how fluctuations in the volume of media messages disseminated to the public might affect individuals' attitudes. Petty and Cacioppo's[28] Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, similar to the systematic-heuristic processing model of attitude change,[29] articulates two different processes by which persuasion can occur. At the center of the two processes is the concept of elaboration, which represents the extent to which individuals engage in issue relevant thinking and learning about attitude objects.[30] Existing on a continuum, when elaboration is high, a "central" route of persuasion takes place, where attitudes are formed and changed through a high degree of cognitive activity.[31] Meanwhile, when elaboration is low, a peripheral route of persuasion transpires, where attitudes are formed and changed through a minimal amount of information processing.[32] In general, research has found that the implications of central processing routes are stronger and more stable attitudes, which are consequently more likely to prompt behavioral action.[33]

With respect to agenda setting, the ELM suggests that the relationships between media coverage, public salience, and public attitudes should be more pronounced in central processing episodes than in peripheral processing ones, due to the heightened cognitive activity involved in them. For example, Petty and Priester,[34] linking the ELM and agenda setting, state that "if people come to believe certain issues are more important due to extensive media coverage, it is reasonable that these dimensions of judgment will become more *central* in evaluating the merits of political candidates". In this way, people frequently first learn and think about topics before altering their attitudes towards them (i.e., central processing). Indeed, Hoekstra and Segal,[35] in a study utilizing the ELM to explain public opinion toward court decisions, detail the role of salience when writing that "the degree of personal salience of an issue affects the amount of time one thinks about an issue, how much information one is likely to seek out, how susceptible one will be to persuasive opposing arguments, and ultimately how strongly and consistently one is likely to feel about an issue" .Since learning should be an underlying process behind changes in salience, it follows that salience should precede attitudinal shifts via a central route of persuasion.

On the other hand, the peripheral route indicates that simple dissemination of mass media messages may have a more immediate connection to attitudinal outcomes, though weaker than when established via central routes. However, this *does not* mean that peripheral routes bypass salience altogether. Instead, it merely proposes that the linkages are not as strong. In peripheral processing situations, the relationships among media coverage, public salience, and attitudes should be weaker due to the lower amount of information processing involved, although relationships would not be totally nonexistent. Basically, we argue that the impact of mass media increases as public salience of objects increases. Conceptualizing a continuum of public salience is useful for mapping out the extent of elaboration in which people engage. Thus, high elaboration individuals should evince stronger linkages among media salience, public salience, and public attitude shifts. Conversely, low elaboration individuals should experience weaker linkages among media salience, public salience, and public attitude shifts. Visually, Figure 1 depicts a model with the two routes of persuasion.[36]

- - - Figure 1 Here - - -

While the roots of the ELM are at the individual level, much of its theorizing has been applied to field studies on collective- and aggregate-level public opinion,[37] demonstrating its compatibility with agenda setting. Moreover, the extensive experimental literature in agenda setting also points towards several intersections with theories such as the ELM.[38] The need for convergence between individual- and aggregate-level public opinion theory and research has been heavily stressed by several scholars.[39] The synthesis of agenda setting and the ELM in our model attempts such convergence.[40]

With the model introduced above, the next logical question that surfaces is to identify which independent variables are likely to drive elaboration up and down. To answer this, we can look at the types of variables that have been reasoned to affect agenda setting and the ELM and then select the most germane for this study. The ELM proffers two major classes of variables that shape the extent of elaboration audiences engage in when exposed to messages.[41] Generally, these are *personal motivation* and *processing ability*. Due to their broad nature and multidimensional characteristics, it should be noted that these variables have been conceptually and operationally defined in many ways; however, we still try to supply the most inclusive definitions of the terms.

Motivation, for instance, has been defined as "the perceived personal relevance of the communication".[42] Further, it has been viewed as the degree to which "individuals are personally involved with an issue, event, object, or person to the extent that they care about the entity and perceive it as important".[43] Finally, Petty and Cacioppo[44] define it as "the extent to which an advocacy has 'intrinsic importance' or 'personal meaning'". Although conceptual definitions run parallel, operational definitions have varied.[45] For this study, we define motivation as the degree to which people personally care about their political environments. This decision was primarily dictated by data availability. Operationally, this might be defined as the degree to which people care about issues or elections.[46] The second set of variables, usually dubbed processing ability, entails the mental capacity of individuals to process information. Operationally, this might be defined in terms of education, reading ability, or the level of information people possess about issues.[47] Research has shown that high motivation and processing ability lead to central processing routes, while low motivation and processing ability lead to peripheral processing routes.[48] However, there are exceptions to these patterns,[49] and it is important to acknowledge that there are few instances of "purely" central or peripheral routes. Still, we anticipate similar relationships for our basic model.

From the agenda setting literature, the need for orientation construct, grounded in information processing, has the most potential in terms of determining predictions for this study's conceptual model. It suggests that when information is highly relevant (similar to the ELM) and when people have high levels of uncertainty about topics, they are more prone to having mass media shape their perceived salience of objects.[50] Given the common element of personal relevance between the ELM and agenda setting, we can probably conjecture that higher levels of *uncertainty* would also be associated with people undergoing central processing rather than peripheral processing routes. Operationally, uncertainty could be defined as how much conviction people have about voting decisions [51] or estimates about how much more information they need about issues. Taken together, we can add these three sets of variables to our base model for speculating about which routes of persuasion dominate in different situations. Due to logistical constraints, our empirical analysis will only investigate predictions concerning personal motivation, but we cover the other variables to provide a more comprehensive theoretical portrayal of how the model functions. Figure 2 presents the expanded model.

- - - Figure 2 Here - - -

Accordingly, the following hypotheses are presented:

*H5: Media attention to public figures will be more strongly correlated (positively) to the amount of people who recognize those same public figures for highly motivated audiences than for minimally motivated ones (salience).*

*H6: Media attention to public figures will be more strongly correlated (positively) to the amount of people who hold attitudes (positive, negative, and neutral) about those same public figures for highly motivated audiences than for minimally motivated ones (formation).*

*H7: Media attention to public figures will be more strongly correlated (positively) to the amount of people who hold non-neutral attitudes about those same public figures for highly motivated audiences than for minimally motivated ones (dispersion).*

*H8: Media attention to public figures will be more strongly correlated (positively) to the amount of people who hold polarized (positive and negative) attitudes about those same public figures for highly motivated audiences than for minimally motivated ones (polarization).*

### *Summary*

In summary, the model proposes that media attention to objects in the news can have consistent effects on both public salience and public attitudes. That is, higher volumes of media coverage should be tied to elevated levels of public salience, more attitudes being formed, more non-neutral attitudes being stimulated, and a higher amount of polarized attitudes being exhibited. These patterns should be more conspicuous for audiences who are highly motivated than for minimally motivated ones.

## Methods

In order to test our conceptual model, we studied cross-sectional data of media content and public opinion taken during the 1996 presidential election from the University of Michigan's National Election Studies (NES) pre-election poll. In particular, media content and public opinion of numerous political figures were measured to assess linkages among news coverage, public salience, and the strength of public attitudes. Because this study was limited by secondary analysis, we were compelled to monitor only those public figures asked about on the NES survey. This was not a major shortcoming though, because the political figures represented a wide range on the American political scene. The list of public figures included: Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson (N=11). Conveniently, this "agenda" of public figures could be compared in terms of media coverage and public opinion.

### *Media Content*

News content for the study was derived from prominent media outlets that were available on the Lexis-Nexis database. It was essential that our content originate in national outlets since the NES survey was national in nature. It was also important to use multiple measures because employing several indicators of variables tends to improve reliability.[52] A blend of print and broadcast channels was selected to secure as representative of an image of news content as possible. Initially, the outlets selected were the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and *Los Angeles Times* for newspapers; *Newsweek* and *U.S. News & World Report* for magazines; and ABC News, NBC News, and CBS News archives for television outlets. NBC news was dropped from the analysis because of reliability concerns — namely, that it did not glean enough content to justifiably test statistically. In the end, the remaining eight outlets should have still supplied us with a relatively exhaustive depiction of news involving the selected political figures.

Once we chose the news outlets, the next question that had to be managed was when to start and stop measuring news content. Any research that attempts to isolate relationships between content and public opinion must inevitably deal with the issue of time lag. Chaffee[53] punctuates this point when stating that "there is always the danger that a causal effect will 'dissipate' over time if the researcher waits too long to measure it" (p.8). Because the ELM has not really concentrated on the time-lag question (since most of its research is experimental), and because this study is largely anchored in agenda setting, agenda setting scholarship was mainly referred to when addressing this question. Empirical work has produced mixed results with regard to the issue of appropriate time lag. For example, scholars have found effects from a few days [54] up to several months prior to public opinion surveys.[55]

Due to the minimal consensus concerning the time-lag problem, we decided to take an approach that would take into account both *short-term* and *long-term* news content. Since the NES pre-election survey was administered in September, October, and November of 1996, picking an exact time to stop monitoring news content was not straightforward. In order to capture the largest portion of the population and because Election Day is the natural breakpoint between the pre- and post-election NES polls, news coverage was tracked up to and including October. Thus, time-order was somewhat established. For short-term content, news stories were tallied for two months prior to the election (September and October). For long-term news content, news coverage was tallied for five months prior to the election (June, July, August, September, and October), similar to the time span tracked by Winter & Eyal[56] — one of the more cited pieces on time lag and agenda setting.

As has been the case in scores of studies, media salience was defined in terms of story frequency.[57] For electronic media, the unit of analysis was adjusted to daily transcripts because of the manner in which Lexis-Nexis archives broadcast materials. To generate enough statistical distribution with content from broadcast channels, transcripts from multiple news programs had to be used. Thus, ABC news coverage included transcripts from "World News Tonight," "Nightline," "This Week with David Brinkley," etc. This was, of course, not the most desirable alternative, but was a necessary step to include broadcast content.

Stories were selected using keyword searches in the Lexis-Nexis database. Monthly tallies were kept with story frequencies for each public figure. The base population of stories was chosen by the entering the name of the public figure into the Lexis-Nexis database, along with the requirement that it appear in the headline or lead of stories. Given the inverted pyramid style of reporting, this should yield a base sample of pertinent stories. Once the initial stories were collected, an independent, trained human coder reviewed the stories and removed those that did not directly deal with the public figures targeted. For example, in July 1996, the number of stories in *The New York Times* mentioning "Newt Gingrich" in the headline or lead of articles was 67 but was then reduced to 35 when reviewed by the coder. The coder determined this by answering the following question: "Was the political figure a central actor in this story?" Once irrelevant stories were removed, we could then compare trends in media coverage and public opinion. In total, the volume of stories/transcripts used in the analysis (across media outlets) was 1,244.

*Public Opinion Data*

The 1996 NES pre-election poll supplied the public opinion data for this study.[58] Again, the dimensions of public opinion that we were interested in measuring were perceived salience, attitude formation, attitude dispersion, and attitude polarization. Ideally, we would have liked to measure the salience of public figures using some sort of importance or prominence indicator, much like the conventional "What's the most important problem facing the nation today?" question which has been utilized in agenda setting for so many years. Unfortunately, no such measure existed on the NES survey. As is the case in most secondary analyses, we could only use the data that was available.

As an alternative, we instead used an indirect indicator of salience that could be appropriated from the data. While by no means ideal, we believe that name recognition can at least substitute as an adequate salience measure for collective-level data such as these. Logically, people must be able to *recognize* candidates in order to consider them salient. As a result, it can serve as an indirect measure of salience itself when other options are unavailable. The NES items measuring public opinion towards the various political figures were in the form of 100-point feeling thermometers (See Appendix A for exact questions). According to Mann and Wolfinger,[59] the NES thermometer questions are true indicators of name recognition because "the respondents could indicate they did not recognize the name [of political figures], that they recognized the name but could not rate the person, or that they recognized and rated the person". Thus, the amount of people who "don't recognize" the person whom they were asked to give an opinion about served as our salience measure. These numbers were converted because (in their raw form) the lower the amount of respondents in this category, the higher the level of recognition.

Measuring the amount of respondents who recorded any neutral or non-neutral opinions (i.e., anywhere on the 100-point scale) about public figures operationalized attitude formation. It should be noted that a "don't know" category was available to respondents so that all people counted on the thermometer scales expressed some sort of attitude about the political figures. Attitude dispersion was assessed by monitoring the amount of respondents who reported non-neutral attitudes (i.e., anywhere on the scale except at the 50-point mark). Finally, attitude polarization was measured calculating the *summed* amount of people falling at the zero- and 100-point ends of the scale. The "amount" of respondents along these various dimensions of public opinion was ascertained in two ways. First, public opinion percentages were recorded.[60] Second, the raw frequency of respondents was also recorded. This two-prong approach offered a more rigid test of the hypotheses through the use of internal replication. In total, the number of respondents was 1,714.

The final question to be addressed was how to divide our sample into high and low motivation audiences. One aspect of personal motivation that has been commonly emphasized in empirical research is the degree to which people care about attitude objects.[61] The NES provides two questions that can be used to divide audiences in such a manner with regard to their political environments. Specifically, the extent to which they care about elections should reflect a natural outcropping of their political motivation. For example, Perloff[62] used — among other items — questions asking respondents how much they cared about election outcomes to measure political motivation. In a similar vein, the first item we used asked respondents to estimate how much they cared about who won the presidential election, and the second item asked them to estimate how much they cared about who won the House of Representatives election (See Appendix A for exact questions).

The high motivation group represented those people who said they "cared a good deal" about who won the presidency and said they cared "very much" about who won the House elections. The low motivation group represented those people who said they "don't care very much" about who won the presidency and said they cared "not very much" or "not at all" about who won the House election.[63] In both the high and low motivation cases, respondents had to fulfill both criteria[64] to be included in the analysis, helping ensure a stronger manipulation of the main independent variable.

*Data Analysis Strategy*

As mentioned above, the research design for this project permitted us to make comparisons between an agenda of media coverage and an agenda of public opinion for political figures. Because sample size was small (N=11 political figures), Spearmann's rho correlations were employed for the various comparisons. Kachigan[65], McCall[66], and Weaver[67] all contend that such nonparametric tests are good options for analyses with small sample sizes. In essence, correlations between the volume of media coverage and the distribution of public opinion determined whether relationships existed or not. The following example analyzing attitude dispersion sketches out the process.

Let's assume that the number of stories in *The New York Times* for the entire six month time frame was 5 for Hillary Clinton, 10 for Pat Buchanan, 15 for Jesse Jackson, 20 for Newt Gingrich, 25 for Colin Powell, 30 for Steve Forbes, 35 for Phil Gramm, 40 for Louis Farrakhan, 45 for Lamar Alexander, 50 for Elizabeth Dole, and 55 for Pat Robertson. Now, let's also assume that the percentages of people who expressed non-neutral attitudes about these figures were 70 percent for Hillary Clinton, 72 percent for Pat Buchanan, 74 percent for Jesse Jackson, 76 percent for Newt Gingrich, 78 percent for Colin Powell, 80 percent for Steve Forbes, 82 percent for Phil Gramm, 84 percent for Louis Farrakhan, 86 percent for Lamar Alexander, 88 percent for Elizabeth Dole, and 90 percent for Pat Robertson respectively. A Spearmann's rho correlation of these two lists would produce a coefficient of +1.00, implying that attitudes became more dispersed as media coverage of public figures increased, supporting Hypothesis 3. This was the basic protocol utilized for all comparisons.

## Results

Tables 1, 2, 3, and 4 report the correlations between media coverage (short-term and long-term) and public opinion for Hypotheses 1 through 4. These hypotheses were tested on aggregate public opinion.

--- Table 1 Here ---

--- Table 2 Here ---

---Table 3 Here ---

---Table 4 Here ---

Hypothesis 1 predicted that positive relationships would be observed between media attention to political figures and public recognition of those figures. The data appear to strongly support the hypothesis for long-term coverage, but show mixed results for short-term coverage. Specifically, 12 out of 14 comparisons reached or approached statistical significance for long-term content, while only four out of 14 did the same for short-term content. Generally, more respondents recognized public figures as *cumulative* media coverage of those figures rose. The relationships between news coverage and public salience were markedly higher for *Newsweek* with a median correlation of +.65. The *Los Angeles Times* was strongest for newspapers.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that a positive relationship would exist between media salience and attitude formation. This hypothesis was also supported by the data with attitude formation increasing among respondents as the volume of news content rose. The relationship was again more pronounced for long-term than for short-term coverage with 12 out of 14 comparisons reaching or approaching statistical significance for cumulative media content. Also paralleling Hypothesis 1, the strongest relationships were found for *Newsweek* and the *Los Angeles Times.* As a result, print news coverage — on aggregate-level public opinion — is most associated with name recognition and attitude formation.

Hypothesis 3 posited that attitude dispersion would increase as media salience increased. The data display strongly positive relationships, offering substantial support for this theorizing. Evidence for attitude dispersion was statistically significant in 23 out of 28 cases. Correlation coefficients of +.88, among the highest for any of the aggregate comparisons, were obtained for attitude dispersion. Unlike the salience and formation instances, broadcast media were most strongly associated with attitude dispersion. The median correlation for such linkages was +.70. Overall, media coverage appears to be tied to the development of non-neutral attitudes. Weaker relationships were again observed with the shorter time lags.

Hypothesis 4 called for a positive relationship between media salience and attitude polarization. Unlike the prior hypotheses, it was strongly supported by both the short-term and long-term news coverage. Specifically, escalations in media salience were meaningfully correlated with the voicing of polarized attitudes among respondents in 26 out of 28 cases, making it the most robust relationship of any of the aggregate-level comparisons. For polarization, newspapers tended to have the firmest relationships. For example, the +.89 correlation for *The New York Times* was the highest among any of the collective-level comparisons. Further, the median correlation for newspaper coverage and attitude polarization was +.68.

In general then, the data suggest that increases in media concern with political figures may play a vital role in the recognition, formation, and extremity of reactions presented in public opinion concerning those same figures. The multiple tests of the hypotheses indicated that the findings are robust.

Our second set of hypotheses dealt with how varying levels of audience motivation would impact the linkages between media coverage and public reactions. Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8 report the results for short-term and long-term news content.

- - - Table 5 Here - - -

- - - Table 6 Here - - -

- - - Table 7 Here - - -

- - - Table 8 Here - - -

Hypothesis 5 anticipated stronger relationships between media attention and name recognition of political figures for highly motivated audiences as opposed to minimally motivated ones. On the whole, the data did not support this assertion. Low motivation groups reported stronger linkages in 16 out of 28 comparisons, although the differences were small. The median correlation for low motivation groups was +.45 compared to

+.42 for high motivation groups. Relationships approaching or reaching significance were noted for news magazines in eight out of eight comparisons.

Hypothesis 6, which predicted higher associations between media salience and attitude formation for high motivation groups, was also not supported by the data. Low motivation groups demonstrated stronger relationships for attitude formation in 20 out of 28 instances. Again, the differences were quite small with the median correlation for low motivation groups only reaching a coefficient of +.47 compared to +.48 for high motivation audiences. The most discernable pattern was that low motivation groups experienced stronger relationships with news coverage coming from magazines in eight out of eight instances.

Hypothesis 7 suggested that the high motivation groups would exhibit stronger linkages between news coverage and attitude dispersion. The most compelling evidence for any hypothesis occurred in this case with 28 out of 28 comparisons bolstering this assertion. High motivation groups revealed more non-neutral attitudes than low motivation groups when media coverage galvanized. The median correlation for high motivation groups was +.78 compared to +.59 for low motivation groups. To illustrate the strength of the evidence for the high motivation groups, over one-third of the correlations attained coefficients of +.80 or higher and three were over +.90. Comparatively, the low motivation groups only had one coefficient exceed +.80.

Finally, Hypothesis 8 forecast stronger relationships between media attention and attitude polarization for highly motivated respondents. Some moderate differences were observed, garnering some support for the hypothesis. High motivation groups reported stronger correlations in 17 out of 28 comparisons. The median correlation for high motivation groups was +.73 versus +.66 for low motivation groups. *The New York Times* exhibited the strongest linkages for polarization.

Overall, the findings convey that people who personally care about their political environments are more inclined to experience central processing routes than peripheral ones for attitude dispersion and polarization, but not for salience and attitude formation. Table 9 summarizes the findings for the motivation hypotheses.

- - - Table 9 Here - - -

## Discussion

### *Interpretation*

#### Aggregate Data

The evidence suggests that there are indeed some consistent linkages between the amount of attention media pay to political figures and fluctuations in public salience and public attitudes. Media salience appears to be linked to heightened levels of perceived salience and strengthened attitudes. The direct correlation between media salience and public salience is noteworthy because little empirical work has documented such relationships for the salience of public figures (as opposed to the traditional object of issues).

While most of the relationships between media and public salience were statistically significant, they were generally weaker than those encompassing public attitudes. This is somewhat surprising given the conventional view of a hierarchy of effects between cognitions and attitudes.[68] Obviously, some of this is connected to the name recognition measure being employed to approximate perceived public salience, yet this pattern continues among the attitudinal measures for aggregate-level public opinion as well. For example, we would expect that stronger relationships would be evident for attitude formation, followed by attitude dispersion, and finally the weakest among attitude polarization. However, attitude polarization and dispersion are the strongest dimensions of public opinion associated with news coverage, while attitude formation is the weakest. A different operationalization of formation might improve its relationship with media coverage; for instance, an alternative way to operationalize it would be to use the amount of people in the "don't know" category to show formation. This is similar to Zaller's[69] use of the "no opinion" category in recording attitudes about the Vietnam War. Future research should attempt to explain these discrepancies in more detail.

In addition to variations dependent upon which dimensions of public opinion were being considered, linkages were also contingent upon the types of content being tracked. For example, the differences between effects evident from short-term and long-term time lags fluctuated (with long-term content exposing stronger relationships), indicating that total media content may be somewhat more important than content immediately preceding public opinion polls in swaying individuals' responses. Of course, we can only speculate about causality at this point given the study's research design. However, the data strongly imply that raised attention to political figures helps people form and structure attitudes towards those same figures, regardless of the valence of that attention itself. Too often, research has assumed that attitudinal consequences from media messages could only be detected if the positive or negative valence of those messages was accounted for. This project indicates that this assumption may be too simplistic. Short-term coverage did show some relationships, so its impact should not be underestimated. The robustness of relationships across print and broadcast channels hint that medium differences operate similarly, yet network news and magazine content had firmer linkages with public opinion than newspapers.

## Subgroup Data

The hypotheses on motivation indicated that groups caring about election outcomes were more prone to revealing pronounced relationships between news coverage and public opinion than uncaring groups for some dimensions of public opinion, but uncaring groups showed more pronounced relationships for others. In cases of salience and attitude formation, for instance, low motivation groups showed stronger linkages. In contrast, high motivation groups showed slightly stronger linkages for attitude polarization, yet those differences were small. Still, the difference between high and low motivation groups was quite striking for attitude dispersion.

Collectively, the evidence posits that mass media attention to political figures helps motivated audiences shift from neutral to non-neutral ones. To a lesser degree, mass media seem to stimulate more polarized attitudes among motivated respondents. Contrary to the hypotheses, news coverage appears to raise awareness and form attitudes with greater consistency among unmotivated audiences. In general, this suggests that the impact of mass media across dimensions of attitude strength is not uniform and probably depends upon context and circumstances, findings meriting future scholarly attention.

Unlike the aggregate-level data, only small differences appeared with respect to short-term and long-term content for the subgroup-level data. Both seem to be equally tied to public opinion when separating groups based on levels of audience motivation, although short-term coverage exposes five more relationships in the hypothesized direction than long-term coverage (35 to 30). An exception occurred for attitude polarization. Similar to the aggregate-level data, the strongest correlations emerged from network news and magazine content. Nevertheless, there was a general pattern of association for all three types of outlets (newspapers, magazines, and broadcast news). In fact, if *Washington Post* content were removed from the analysis, all three media channels would be similarly associated. In terms of predicted outcomes, there were minimal differences among media channels and specific outlets. This proposes that the linkages between news coverage and public opinion among motivated and unmotivated audiences are not overly dependent upon content type.

### *Implications*

Overall, the data imply that agenda setting may have some consistent attitudinal consequences. Although only observed for political figures, changes in the sheer volume of coverage may affect the formation and extremification of attitudes concerning objects in the news. In the low salience context of politics that dominates the U.S. political scene, this is an important political role. In fact, we might adjust McCombs and Estrada's[70] reformulation of Bernard Cohen's classic summary of media influence to state that media not only tell us what to think about and how to think about it, they may also tell us how *strongly* to feel about it.

This finding is also substantial because it highlights the point that investigating *attitude change* is probably too constricting for locating the attitudinal impact of news. Instead, researchers should consider the more expansive concept of attitude strength and further examine such relationships using causal designs.[71] The notions of attitude formation, dispersion, and polarization explicated in this project can assist in approaching these questions in future research. Replication of the findings herein with other "object types" is additionally needed to ascertain the generalizibility of the results. Moreover, it would also be helpful for scholars to probe the attitudinal consequences of second-level agenda setting. For example, building on this study, researchers might probe the degree to which the personal and professional lives of these public figures (as attributes) are covered in news and how these content patterns are tied with individuals' attitudes.

The synthesis of theoretical perspectives between the ELM and agenda setting also appears to be promising based on the data. The parsimony achieved through merging the tenets of the different theories may lead to a comprehensive model of campaign media effects. Despite the fact that the theories evolved from different academic camps and methodologies, their synthesis proved valuable in this initial empirical inquiry. In areas where agenda setting is limited theoretically, such as fleshing out the persuasional consequences of news, the ELM adds greatly to it. Likewise, in areas where the ELM is limited, such as grasping the dynamics between news content and people's cognitions, agenda-setting theory is useful. Thus, we encourage future research to more fully probe the potential of the advanced conceptual model.

The value of convergence between previously unconnected theoretical outlooks should not be underappreciated. Frequently, scholars are fearful of borrowing and synthesizing materials from diverse conceptual foundations. While this would be disturbing for almost any academic discipline, it is especially disconcerting in the field of mass communication, which is interdisciplinary at its very core. Convergence of theories like the ELM and agenda setting can only strengthen our understanding of mass communication processes and effects by avoiding redundancy in research, testing out concepts in multiple contexts, and generally breaking down the invisible walls often placed across disciplines and methodologies.

With regard to predictor variables, while motivation worked well for parts of the conceptual model, future research should also consider the variables of uncertainty and processing ability. Analyses that scrutinize these variables individually and together would aid researchers in learning which audiences are most amenable to experiencing cognitive and attitudinal shifts as a result of fluctuations in media salience towards objects and their corresponding attributes.

Despite its potential implications, this study had limitations. First, the use of secondary data was problematic in the sense that it limited how well we could operationalize some of the key concepts — particularly salience. Still, name recognition was a suitable alternative given the circumstances surrounding the project. The small sample size of 11 was also a concern because of the difficulty in generalizing from small samples. However, the sample size is not particularly small for agenda setting research, which often utilizes much smaller agenda sizes.[72] Furthermore, when we take into account that the data underlying our agenda lists are based on hundreds of stories and survey respondents, their validity and reliability become much stronger. The use of multiple media outlets provided several replication tests of our hypotheses, raising confidence in the findings. Our reliance on national news outlets was also worrisome because these sources were presumed to be a surrogate for actual media content that survey respondents were exposed to, much of which would have come from local outlets. The research showing that media content (in terms of volume dedicated to specific stories) runs similar across outlets should allay such concerns.[73] Finally, the correlational design of the study makes us conservative in any conjecture about causal relationships. Still, covariation and time order were established on some level, warranting further empirical investigation.

In conclusion, this study only began to scratch the surface of the gap in research existing for investigating the attitudinal ramifications of agenda setting. More work is needed to address this fundamental theoretical and empirical question. Approaching it from first-level and second-level perspectives could prove quite fruitful in teasing out the dynamics behind such public opinion processes.

## Notes

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[7] Mutz, D., *Impersonal Influence: How perceptions of mass collectives affect political attitudes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

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[16] For example, King, "*Communication and Democracy*"; Bryan, K., "Political communication and agenda setting in low-involvement races." Unpublished doctoral dissertation (University of Texas, Austin, 1997; McCombs et al., "Candidate images in Spanish elections: second level agenda-setting effects."

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[18] Krosnick, J.A., & Petty, R.E., "Attitude Strength: An Overview," in *Attitude Strength: Antecedents and Consequences*, eds., R.E. Petty & J.A. Krosnick (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), 1-24.

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[20] At this stage, it is important to distinguish between particular properties of public attitudes in order to avoid confusion with other definitions of these terms. Although both dispersion and polarization are concerned with attitudes that move away from the center of affect scales, we suggest that polarization deals more with attitudes that flow to the *far* ends of scales, while dispersion simply refers to movement away from the *center point*, though not necessarily all the way to the polar ends. In this formulation, dispersion effects could become polarization effects, but not in all cases. This distinction is crucial because subtle

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relationships between press content and public attitudes could be missed without precise explications of our terms and their underpinning features.

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[30] Petty & Cacioppo, *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude* Change.

[31] Petty, R.E., & Cacioppo, J.T., "Issue involvement as a moderator of the effects on attitude of advertising content and context," in *Advances in Consumer Research* 8, eds., K.B. Monroe (Ann Arbor, MI: Association for Consumer Research, 1981), 20-24; Petty, R.E., Cacioppo, J.T., & Schumann, D., "Central and peripheral routes to advertising effectiveness: The moderating role of involvement," *Journal of Consumer Research 10* (1983): 135-146.

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[34] Petty & Priester, "Mass media attitude change: Implications of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion,"100.

[35] Hoekstra, V.J., & Segal, J.A., "The shepherding of local public opinion: The supreme court and lamb's chapel," *The Journal of Politics* 58, 4 (1996): 1085.

[36] It should be stressed that we *do not* argue that peripheral routes to persuasion show *no* attitudinal

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effects, just that their attitudinal effects will be weaker than central routes. In fact, if our findings conferred no evidence of attitudinal outcomes in peripheral processing conditions, our theorizing would be faulty. Specifically, we are distinguishing between groups that will exhibit some attitudinal effects and those that would be open to considerable effects.

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[40] The convergence of elements from these two models offers some noteworthy benefits. First, it enhances the ELM by tracing how news content, in terms of sheer volume, might have attitudinal implications rather than simply focusing on intentionally persuasive messages or *only* positive and negative news stories. Second, it helps push the ELM beyond the laboratory where the majority of the empirical work has been performed, thereby strengthening its generalizibility. For agenda setting, it offers a systematic explanation of how simple media attention to objects in the news can have attitudinal effects. Further, it offers a dual-process model to account for how such media effects might operate.

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[43] Thomsen, C.J., Borgida, E., & Lavine, H., "The causes and consequences of personal involvement," in *Attitude Strength: Antecedents and consequences*, eds., R.E. Petty & J.A. Krosnick (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995), 191.

[44] Petty & Cacioppo, *Attitude and persuasion: Classic and contemporary approaches*, 81.

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[47] For example, Alvarez & Brehm, "American ambivalence towards abortion policy: Development of a heteroskedastic probit model of competing values."

[48] Petty & Priester, "Mass media attitude change: Implications of the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion."; Petty, R.E., Wheeler, S.C., & Bizer, G.Y., "Attitude functions and persuasion: An elaboration likelihood approach to matched versus mismatched messages," in *Why We Evaluate: Functions of attitudes*, eds., G.R. Maio & J.M. Olson (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2000), 133-162.

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[58] Directed by Steven J. Rosenstone, Donald R. Kinder , and Warren E. Miller. NATIONAL ELECTION STUDIES, 1996 Pre- and Post-Election surveys. ICPSR Archive Number 6896. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, Center for Political Studies. These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant Nos.: SBR-9317631, SES-9209410, SES-9009379, SES-8808361, SES-8341310, SES-8207580 and SOC77-08885. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these materials are those solely of the author(s). The response rate for the poll was 71 percent.

[59] Mann, T., & Wolfinger, R., "Candidates and Parties in Congressional Elections." *American Political* Science Review 74 (1980): 622.

[60] For attitude formation and salience measures, the percentage of *all* responses to the questions were used. For attitude dispersion and polarization, the more conventional approach of using the percentage of those who expressed attitudes (i.e., somewhere on the 100-point scale) was adopted.

[61] For example, Thomsen, C.J., Borgida, E., & Lavine, H., "The causes and consequences of personal involvement." In R.E. Petty & J.A. Krosnick (Eds.), *Attitude Strength: Antecedents and consequences* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995); Petty, R.E., & Cacioppo, J.T. *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change* (New York: Springer / Verlag, 1986).

[62] Perloff, R.M., "Personal relevance and campaign information seeking: A cognitive response-based approach," in *Mass Media and Political Thought: An information-processing approach,* eds., S. Kraus & R.M. Perloff (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985), 177-200.

[63] The bottom two categories of the House question were collapsed because there were too few respondents in the lowest level to be usable.

[64] e.g., "care a good deal" about the presidency and "very much" about the House election.

[65] Kachigan, S.K., *Statistical Analysis: An interdisciplinary introduction to univariate and multivariate*

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*methods* (New York, New York: Radius Press, 1986).

[66] McCall, R.B., *Fundamental Statistics for Behavioral Sciences.* (San Francisco, CA: Duxburry Press, 1994).

[67] Weaver, D.H., "Basic statistical tools." in *Research Methods in Mass Communication*, eds., G.H. Stempel III & B.H. Westley (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1989), 49-89.

[68] For example, Lavidge, R.J. & Steiner, G.A., "A model for predictive measurements of advertising effectiveness," *Journal of Marketing*, (1961, October): 59-62; Park, C.W., & Mittal, B., "A theory of involvement in consumer behavior: Problems and issues," *Research in Behavior I* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1985), 201-232.

[69] Zaller, " Information, values, and opinion."

[70] McCombs & Estrada, "The news media and the pictures in our heads."

[71] Krosnick & Petty," Attitude Strength: An Overview."; Boninger et al.," The causes and consequences of attitude importance."; Krosnick & Schuman, "Attitude intensity, importance and certainty and susceptibility to response effects."

[72] For example, Schoenbach, K., *Agenda-setting effects of print and television in West Germany.* Paper presented at the International Communication Association Annual Convention, Boston, MA, 1982, May.

[73] For example, Reese, S.D., & Danielian, L., "Intermedia influence and the drug issue: Converging on cocaine." In P.J. Shoemaker (Ed.), *Communication Campaigns about Drugs* (Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989); Whitney & Becker 1982.

## Appendix A: NES Poll Questions

1. Feeling Thermometer:

- "I'd like to get your feelings toward some of our political leaders and other people who are in the news these days. I'll read the name of a person and I'd like you to rate that person using something we call the feeling thermometer. Ratings between 50 degrees and 100 degrees mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the person. Ratings between 0 and 50 degrees mean that you don't feel favorable toward the person and that you don't care too much for that person. You would rate the person at the 50-degree mark if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the person. If we come to a person whose name you don't recognize, you don't need to rate the person. Just tell me and we'll move on to the next one."

- A "don't know" response is also available to respondents. The "don't know" item includes a probe asking respondents to clarify if their don't know means that they don't recognize the political figure or if it means they don't know where to rate him or her.

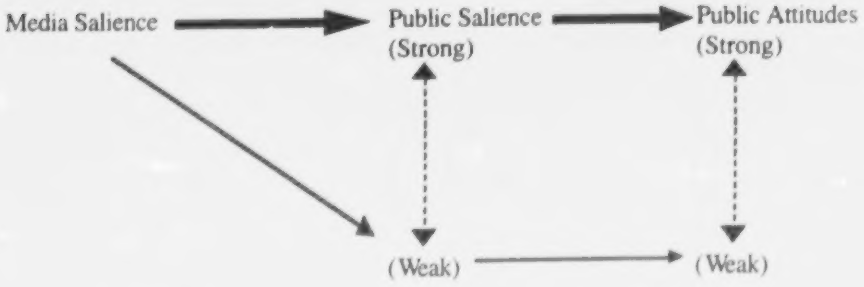
2. Motivation Items:

- "Generally speaking, would you say that you personally CARE A GOOD DEAL who wins the presidential election this fall, or that you DON'T CARE VERY MUCH who wins?"

- "As you know, representatives to Congress in Washington will be chosen in this election from congressional districts all around the country. How much would you say that you personally care about the way the election to the U.S. House of Representatives comes out. Do you care VERY MUCH, PRETTY MUCH, NOT VERY MUCH or NOT AT ALL?"

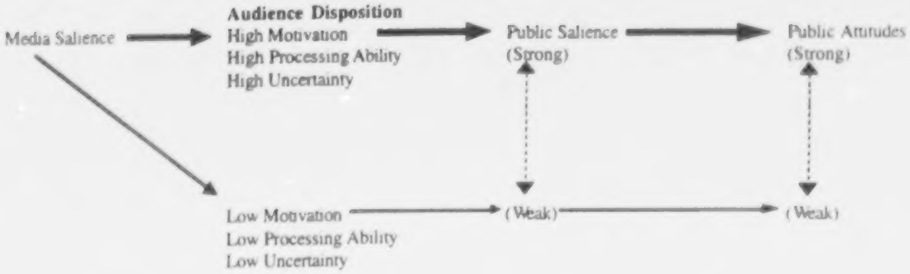
# Figures

Figure 1: A Schematic Model of the Attitudinal Consequences of Agenda Setting


Media Salience
Public Salience
(Strong)
Public Attitudes
(Strong)
(Weak)
(Weak)

NOTE: Thicker lines represent central routes to persuasion, and thinner lines represent peripheral routes to persuasion.

Figure 2: A Schematic Model of the Attitudinal Consequences of Agenda Setting with Determinant Variables


Media Salience
Audience Disposition
High Motivation
High Processing Ability
High Uncertainty
Public Salience
(Strong)
Public Attitudes
(Strong)
Low Motivation
Low Processing Ability
Low Uncertainty
(Weak)
(Weak)

NOTE: Thicker lines represent central routes to persuasion, and thinner lines represent peripheral routes to persuasion.

## Tables

Table 1: Correlations between Long-Term Media Coverage and Public Opinion (Percentages) of Political Figures

| Media Outlet | Dispersion | Formation | Salience | Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABC News | .82[b] | .49[a] | .50[a] | .70[b] |
| CBS News | .88[a] | .62[b] | .58[b] | .76[b] |
| LA Times | .78[a] | .73[b] | .70[b] | .71[b] |
| NY Times | .82[b] | .47[a] | .45[a] | .82[b] |
| Wash. Post | .56[b] | .04 | .04 | .66[b] |
| Newsweek | .81[b] | .75[b] | .71[b] | .59[b] |
| U.S. News & World Report | .64[b] | .69[b] | .66[b] | .30 |

a. p<.10 one-tailed test
b. p<.05 one-tailed test
c. p<.001 one-tailed test

Note: Public Opinion data are based on 1996 National Election Studies questions asking respondents to rate public figures on a 100-point thermometer scale of affect. The public figures were Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson.

1. Dispersion refers to the extent to which public opinion moves away from non-neutral positions about political figures. Specifically, higher correlations mean as media coverage rises, more people are moving away from the 50-percent category of the thermometer scales.

2. Attitude formation refers to the extent to which people are forming any attitudes about political figures (both neutral and non-neutral). Specifically, higher correlations mean that as media coverage rises, more people are rating political figures somewhere along the 100-point thermometer scale.

3. Salience refers to the extent to which people recognize the political figures they are being questioned about. These data are converted from the amount of people who "don't recognize" the public figures they are being questioned about. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people recognize the public figures.

4. Polarization refers to the extent that public opinion moves to the far ends of the 100-point scale. Specifically, it is the summed amount of people at the 0 and 100 points on the scale. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people are holding polarized positions about public figures.

Table 2: Correlations between Short-Term Media Coverage and Public Opinion (Percentages) of Political Figures

| Media Outlet | Dispersion | Formation | Salience | Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABC News | $.69^b$ | .25 | 20 | $.73^b$ |
| CBS News | $.71^b$ | .17 | .11 | $.68^b$ |
| LA Times | $.45^a$ | .28 | .30 | $.63^b$ |
| NY Times | $.56^b$ | .20 | .19 | $.68^b$ |
| Wash. Post | .28 | .04 | .00 | $.52^a$ |
| Newsweek | $.74^b$ | $.64^b$ | $.59^b$ | $.71^b$ |
| U.S. News & World Report | $.56^b$ | $.55^b$ | $.55^b$ | $.65^b$ |

a. $p<.10$ one-tailed test
b. $p<.05$ one-tailed test
c. $p<.001$ one-tailed test

Note: Public Opinion data are based on 1996 National Election Studies questions asking respondents to rate public figures on a 100-point thermometer scale of affect. The public figures were Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson.

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2. Attitude formation refers to the extent to which people are forming any attitudes about political figures (both neutral and non-neutral). Specifically, higher correlations mean that as media coverage rises, more people are rating political figures somewhere along the 100-point thermometer scale.

3. Salience refers to the extent to which people recognize the political figures they are being questioned about. These data are converted from the amount of people who "don't recognize" the public figures they are being questioned about. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people recognize the public figures.

4. Polarization refers to the extent that public opinion moves to the far ends of the 100-point scale. Specifically, it is the summed amount of people at the 0 and 100 points on the scale. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people are holding polarized positions about public figures.

Table 3: Correlations between Long-Term Media Coverage and Public Opinion (Raw Totals) of Political Figures

| Media Outlet | Dispersion | Formation | Salience | Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABC News | .68[b] | .49[a] | .50[a] | .66[b] |
| CBS News | .80[b] | .62[b] | .58[b] | .78[b] |
| LA Times | .82[b] | .73[b] | .70[b] | .79[b] |
| NY Times | .68[b] | .47[a] | .45[a] | .89[c] |
| Wash. Post | .28 | .04 | .04 | .64[b] |
| Newsweek | .88[c] | .75[b] | .70[b] | .68[b] |
| U.S. News & World Report | .77[b] | .69[b] | .66[b] | .37 |

a. $p<.10$ one-tailed test
b. $p<.05$ one-tailed test
c. $p<.001$ one-tailed test

Note: Public Opinion data are based on 1996 National Election Studies questions asking respondents to rate public figures on a 100-point thermometer scale of affect. The public figures were Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson.

1. Dispersion refers to the extent to which public opinion moves away from non-neutral positions about political figures. Specifically, higher correlations mean as media coverage rises, more people are moving away from the 50-percent category of the thermometer scales.

2. Attitude formation refers to the extent to which people are forming any attitudes about political figures (both neutral and non-neutral). Specifically, higher correlations mean that as media coverage rises, more people are rating political figures somewhere along the 100-point thermometer scale.

3. Salience refers to the extent to which people recognize the political figures they are being questioned about. These data are converted from the amount of people who "don't recognize" the public figures they are being questioned about. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people recognize the public figures.

4. Polarization refers to the extent that public opinion moves to the far ends of the 100-point scale. Specifically, it is the summed amount of people at the 0 and 100 points on the scale. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people are holding polarized positions about public figures.

Table 4: Correlations between Short-Term Media Coverage and Public Opinion (Raw Totals) of Political Figures

| Media Outlet | Dispersion | Formation | Salience | Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABC News | .51[a] | .25 | .20 | .72[b] |
| CBS News | .48[a] | .17 | .11 | .74[b] |
| LA Times | .34 | .28 | .30 | .67[b] |
| NY Times | .36 | .20 | .19 | .72[b] |
| Wash. Post | .19 | .03 | .00 | .54[b] |
| Newsweek | .77[b] | .64[b] | .59[b] | .80[b] |
| U.S. News & World Report | .61[b] | .55[b] | .55[b] | .73[b] |

a. p<.10 one-tailed test
b. p<.05 one-tailed test
c. p<.001 one-tailed test

Note: Public Opinion data are based on 1996 National Election Studies questions asking respondents to rate public figures on a 100-point thermometer scale of affect. The public figures were Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson.

1. Dispersion refers to the extent to which public opinion moves away from non-neutral positions about political figures. Specifically, higher correlations mean as media coverage rises, more people are moving away from the 50-percent category of the thermometer scales.

2. Attitude formation refers to the extent to which people are forming any attitudes about political figures (both neutral and non-neutral). Specifically, higher correlations mean that as media coverage rises, more people are rating political figures somewhere along the 100-point thermometer scale.

3. Salience refers to the extent to which people recognize the political figures they are being questioned about. These data are converted from the amount of people who "don't recognize" the public figures they are being questioned about. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people recognize the public figures.

4. Polarization refers to the extent that public opinion moves to the far ends of the 100-point scale. Specifically, it is the summed amount of people at the 0 and 100 points on the scale. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people are holding polarized positions about public figures.

Table 5: Correlations between Long-Term Media Coverage and Public Opinion (Percentages) of Political Figures

| Media Outlet | Hi Motivation Dispersion[1] | Low Motivation Dispersion | Hi Motivation Attitude[2] formation | Low Motivation Attitude formation | Hi Motivation Salience[3] | Low Motivation Salience | Hi Motivation Polarization[4] | Low Motivation Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABC News | .80[b] | .66[b] | .52[a] | .45[a] | .43[a] | .45[a] | .63[b] | .71[b] |
| CBS News | .88[c] | .76[b] | .63[b] | .60[b] | .55[b] | .53[b] | .73[b] | .72[b] |
| LA Times | .85[c] | .71[b] | .71[b] | .74[b] | .70[b] | .67[b] | .73[b] | .73[b] |
| NY Times | .91[c] | .70[b] | .46[a] | .49[a] | .41 | .44[a] | .82[b] | .88[c] |
| Wash. Post | .66[b] | .35 | .04 | .02 | .03 | -.01 | .69[b] | .61[b] |
| Newsweek | .82[b] | .73[b] | .76[b] | .79[b] | .74[b] | .71[b] | .55[b] | .65[b] |
| U.S. News & World Report | .60[b] | .56[b] | .70[b] | .73[b] | .70[b] | .69[b] | .23 | .41 |

a. p<.10 one-tailed test
b. p<.05 one-tailed test
c. p<.001 one-tailed test

Note: Public Opinion data are based on 1996 National Election Studies questions asking respondents to rate public figures on a 100-point thermometer scale of affect. The public figures were Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson.

1. Dispersion refers to the extent to which public opinion moves away from non-neutral positions about political figures. Specifically, higher correlations mean as media coverage rises, more people are moving away from the 50-percent category of the thermometer scales.

2. Attitude formation refers to the extent to which people are forming any attitudes about political figures (both neutral and non-neutral). Specifically, higher correlations mean that as media coverage rises, more people are rating political figures somewhere along the 100-point thermometer scale.

3. Salience refers to the extent to which people recognize the political figures they are being questioned about. These data are converted from the amount of people who "don't recognize" the public figures they are being questioned about. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people recognize the public figures.

4. Polarization refers to the extent that public opinion moves to the far ends of the 100-point scale. Specifically, it is the summed amount of people at the 0 and 100 points on the scale. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people are holding polarized positions about public figures.

Table 6: Correlations between Short-Term Media Coverage and Public Opinion (Percentages) of Political Figures

| Media Outlet | Hi Motivation Dispersion[1] | Low Motivation Dispersion | Hi Motivation Attitude[2] formation | Low Motivation Attitude formation | Hi Motivation Salience[3] | Low Motivation Salience | Hi Motivation Polarization[4] | Low Motivation Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABC News | .78[b] | .53[b] | .27 | .24 | .17 | .14 | .72[b] | .66[b] |
| CBS News | .78[b] | .53[b] | .18 | .21 | .10 | .11 | .64[b] | .70[b] |
| LA Times | .62[b] | .30 | .22 | .25 | .24 | .24 | .76[b] | .60[b] |
| NY Times | .71[b] | .37 | .16 | .17 | .14 | .14 | .76[b] | .64[b] |
| Wash. Post | .39 | .25 | .03 | .04 | .01 | .03 | .56[b] | .55[b] |
| Newsweek | .84[c] | .69[c] | .62[b] | .68[b] | .58[b] | .59[b] | .73[b] | .75[b] |
| U.S. News & World Report | .72[b] | .54[b] | .50[a] | .59[b] | .53[b] | .55[b] | .73[b] | .70[b] |

a. p<.10 one-tailed test
b. p<.05 one-tailed test
c. p<.001 one-tailed test

Note: Public Opinion data are based on 1996 National Election Studies questions asking respondents to rate public figures on a 100-point thermometer scale of affect. The public figures were Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson.

1. Dispersion refers to the extent to which public opinion moves away from non-neutral positions about political figures. Specifically, higher correlations mean as media coverage rises, more people are moving away from the 50-percent category of the thermometer scales.

2. Attitude formation refers to the extent to which people are forming any attitudes about political figures (both neutral and non-neutral). Specifically, higher correlations mean that as media coverage rises, more people are rating political figures somewhere along the 100-point thermometer scale.

3. Salience refers to the extent to which people recognize the political figures they are being questioned about. These data are converted from the amount of people who "don't recognize" the public figures they are being questioned about. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people recognize the public figures.

4. Polarization refers to the extent that public opinion moves to the far ends of the 100-point scale. Specifically, it is the summed amount of people at the 0 and 100 points on the scale. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people are holding polarized positions about public figures.

## Table 7: Correlations between Long-Term Media Coverage and Public Opinion (Raw Totals) of Political Figures

| Media Outlet | Hi Motivation Dispersion[1] | Low Motivation Dispersion | Hi Motivation Attitude[2] formation | Low Motivation Attitude formation | Hi Motivation Salience[3] | Low Motivation Salience | Hi Motivation Polarization[4] | Low Motivation Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABC News | .79$^{b}$ | .67$^{b}$ | .52$^{c}$ | .45$^{a}$ | .43$^{a}$ | .45$^{a}$ | .65$^{b}$ | .66$^{b}$ |
| CBS News | .87$^{c}$ | .72$^{b}$ | .63$^{b}$ | .60$^{b}$ | .55$^{b}$ | .53$^{b}$ | .78$^{b}$ | .72$^{b}$ |
| LA Times | .90$^{c}$ | .77$^{b}$ | .71$^{b}$ | .74$^{b}$ | .70$^{b}$ | .67$^{b}$ | .79$^{b}$ | .73$^{b}$ |
| NY Times | .79$^{b}$ | .64$^{b}$ | .46$^{a}$ | .49$^{a}$ | .41 | .44$^{a}$ | .89$^{c}$ | .87$^{c}$ |
| Wash. Post | .45$^{c}$ | .23 | .04 | .02 | .03 | .01 | .64$^{b}$ | .56$^{b}$ |
| Newsweek | .93$^{c}$ | .82$^{b}$ | .76$^{b}$ | .79$^{b}$ | .74$^{b}$ | .71$^{b}$ | .65$^{b}$ | .66$^{b}$ |
| U.S. News & World Report | .83$^{b}$ | .72$^{b}$ | .70$^{b}$ | .73$^{b}$ | .70$^{b}$ | .69$^{b}$ | .36 | .42$^{a}$ |

a. $p<.10$ one-tailed test
b. $p<.05$ one-tailed test
c. $p<.001$ one-tailed test

Note: Public Opinion data are based on 1996 National Election Studies questions asking respondents to rate public figures on a 100-point thermometer scale of affect. The public figures were Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson.

1. Dispersion refers to the extent to which public opinion moves away from non-neutral positions about political figures. Specifically, higher correlations mean as media coverage rises, more people are moving away from the 50-percent category of the thermometer scales.

2. Attitude formation refers to the extent to which people are forming any attitudes about political figures (both neutral and non-neutral). Specifically, higher correlations mean that as media coverage rises, more people are rating political figures somewhere along the 100-point thermometer scale.

3. Salience refers to the extent to which people recognize the political figures they are being questioned about. These data are converted from the amount of people who "don't recognize" the public figures they are being questioned about. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people recognize the public figures.

4. Polarization refers to the extent that public opinion moves to the far ends of the 100-point scale. Specifically, it is the summed amount of people at the 0 and 100 points on the scale. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people are holding polarized positions about public figures.

Table 8: Correlations between Short-Term Media Coverage and Public Opinion (Raw Totals) of Political Figures

| Media Outlet | Hi Motivation Dispersion[1] | Low Motivation Dispersion | Hi Motivation Attitude[2] formation | Low Motivation Attitude formation | Hi Motivation Salience[3] | Low Motivation Salience | Hi Motivation Polarization[4] | Low Motivation Polarization |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ABC News | .61[b] | .43[a] | .27 | .24 | .17 | .14 | .71[b] | .63[b] |
| CBS News | .61[b] | .39 | .18 | .21 | .10 | .11 | .74[b] | .70[b] |
| LA Times | .50[a] | .31 | .21 | .25 | .24 | .24 | .70[b] | .56[b] |
| NY Times | .53[b] | .30 | .16 | .17 | .14 | .14 | .74[b] | .61[b] |
| Wash. Post | .23 | .17 | .03 | .04 | .01 | .03 | .50[a] | .48[a] |
| Newsweek | .82[b] | .70[b] | .62[b] | .68[b] | .58[b] | .59[b] | .79[b] | .77[b] |
| U.S. News & World Report | .70[b] | .62[b] | .50[a] | .59[b] | .53[b] | .55[b] | .75[b] | .70[b] |

a p< 10 one-tailed test
b p< 05 one-tailed test
c. p< 001 one-tailed test

Note: Public Opinion data are based on 1996 National Election Studies questions asking respondents to rate public figures on a 100-point thermometer scale of affect. The public figures were Hillary Clinton, Pat Buchanan, Jesse Jackson, Newt Gingrich, Colin Powell, Steve Forbes, Phil Gramm, Louis Farrakhan, Lamar Alexander, Elizabeth Dole, and Pat Robertson.

1. Dispersion refers to the extent to which public opinion moves away from non-neutral positions about political figures. Specifically, higher correlations mean as media coverage rises, more people are moving away from the 50-percent category of the thermometer scales.

2. Attitude formation refers to the extent to which people are forming any attitudes about political figures (both neutral and non-neutral). Specifically, higher correlations mean that as media coverage rises, more people are rating political figures somewhere along the 100-point thermometer scale.

3. Salience refers to the extent to which people recognize the political figures they are being questioned about. These data are converted from the amount of people who "don't recognize" the public figures they are being questioned about. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people recognize the public figures.

4. Polarization refers to the extent that public opinion moves to the far ends of the 100-point scale. Specifically, it is the summed amount of people at the 0 and 100 points on the scale. Higher correlations indicate that as media coverage rises, more people are holding polarized positions about public figures.

Table 9: Summary of Comparisons between High and Low Relevance Groups across Dimensions of Public Opinion

| | Long-Term Media Coverage Comparisons | | Short-Term Media Coverage Comparisons | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Public Opinion Percent[1] | Public Opinion Raw[2] | Public Opinion Percent | Public Opinion raw | |
| *Dimension of Public Opinion* | | | | | *Totals* |
| Attitude Dispersion | 7 / 7 | 7 / 7 | 7 / 7 | 7 / 7 | 28 / 28 |
| Attitude Formation | 3 / 7 | 1 / 7 | 3 / 7 | 1 / 7 | 8 / 28 |
| Salience of Attitude | 5 / 7 | 1 / 7 | 5 / 7 | 1 / 7 | 12 / 28 |
| Attitude Polarization | 2 / 7 | 4 / 7 | 4 / 7 | 7 / 7 | 17 / 28 |
| *Totals* | 17 / 28 | 13 / 28 | 19 / 28 | 16 / 28 | 65 / 112 |

Note: Values represent the number of comparisons where high motivation groups exhibited higher correlations between media coverage and public opinion than low motivation groups. Thus, the first cell in column one indicates that seven out of seven comparisons showed the correlations between media coverage and attitude dispersion were stronger for high relevance than low relevance groups.

1. Data are based on percentages of people in question distributions.

2. Data are based on raw totals of people in question distributions.

# The Effects of Warning Labels on Cellular Phones in Korea

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## Abstract

The present study sought to determine the effectiveness of warning labels about cellular phones in different conditions. This study found a difference between high-credibility source and low-credibility source of the warning label. However, there were no significant differences between high-fear appeal and low-fear appeal and use time (low, medium, high). Even though there is no significant difference between high fear appeal and low fear appeal, high fear appeal might have an impact on the perception of subjects about warning labels in terms of mean score. Finally, source might be an important factor to make warning labels on the cellular phones in Korea. Also, using high credible source might have a positive impact on warning labels.

## Introduction

We are living in an era where commercial messages and product packages frequently include warnings or other forms of information to assist consumers in product decision-making (Krugman et al., 1994). Warning labels on advertisements inform consumers of the dangers involved in using some risky products, such as cigarettes, prescription drugs and alcohol (Snyder & Blood, 1992). Cautioning consumers about product dangers is a unique challenge for advertisers and policy makers. Therefore, it is important to understand how consumers attend to associated cautionary statements for such products (Fox et al., 1998).

In recent years, there have been many studies on the effects of warning labels on cigarettes, alcohol and nutrition information. For example, Mazis, Morris and Swasy (1990) conducted surveys and found a slight increase in the public reception of risk level related to consuming alcoholic beverages since the warning label went into effect. Also, Abernethy and Teel (1986), in their econometric analysis, concluded that health warnings on cigarette packs gave rise to a decrease in both short- and long-term aggregate consumption. However, there are few studies about warning labels on cellular phones.

In the same view, the radio waves that cellular phones emit might cause brain cancer, although no one has established a solid link (*New York Times*, 1999). Exxon recently hung signs by its pumps banning the tiny phones because they might spark fires outside gas stations (*The Arizona Republic*, 1999). In addition, the clerk in the store has delivered a one-page health-and-safety bulletin that warns of the possible dangers of using a cellular phone (*Time*, 2000).

In a survey conducted by Luntz Research Company in 1998, 59 percent of 1444 participants used and expected to use cellular phones by 2000 (Public Opinion Online, 1998). Cautioning labels might be important for consumers using cellular phones. According to the Statistical Abstract of the United States (1997), cellular phone subscribers increased from 3,509,000 in 1989 to 44,043,000 in 1996 By analyzing this result, it is expected that subscribers will continue to increase at an even faster rate. In addition, according to the Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) in Korea, there are 27 million cellular phone users in Korea, or 60 percent of the total population (MIC, 2000).

The purpose of this study is to determine the effects of warning labels about cellular phones in Korea read under different circumstances. Because consumers are familiar with warning labels on cigarettes and alcoholic beverages, adverse effects may occur. For example, warning can boomerang, according to one study, causing drinkers to perceive greater benefits from the alcoholic beverages (Snyder and Blood, 1992). Understanding the effects of warning labels on cellular phones might be helpful to understand how consumers perceive warning labels and to prepare for future health risks of cellular phones.

It is unclear what happens when consumers see warnings in the context of laboratory experiments with several variables, such as source credibility, fear appeal and use time for cellular phones. What kinds of effects will have an influence on consumers when they see warning labels for cellular phones?

## Theoretical Background

### Persuasive Communication Theory

Health-risk labeling is done to warn people of harms involved with using a product in order to decrease inadvertent self-damage by users who are unaware of these dangers. Risk warnings can be considered a persuasive communication used to influence behavior toward a product (McGuire, 1980).

Bettman, Payne and Staelin (1986) indicated that designers could predict more accurately the effects of a particular format by learning how consumers process information. This can be determined by examining the impact of warning label information on various steps in information processing, such as acceptance, i.e. believability, of message information, and yielding, i.e. forming favorable attitudes toward the information (Andrews, Netwmeyer, & Durvasula, 1990).

McGuire (1976) stated that the believability of information derives from many aspects of communication, including perceptions of the communicated source as well as the context of the message (e.g. type of appeal, structure style, the arguments). Consequently, the believability of information is an important prerequisite to an individual's yielding (i.e. agreeing) with the argument found in the message. Depending upon the cogency or strength of message arguments, an individual will form either favorable or unfavorable attitudes, assuming he or she is motivated and able to process the message content (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

## Previous Research in Other Areas

### Cigarettes

In the case of cigarettes, several econometric studies measured the effects of warning labels on cigarette sales. For example, Abernethy and Teel (1986) noted that health warnings on cigarette packs "resulted in a net decrease in both short- and long-run aggregate consumption." Other surveys and laboratory experiments have shown that consumers pay little attention to warnings on cigarette packs and in cigarette advertisements.

For example, a study of 202 individuals found that there were no differences between smokers and nonsmokers in knowledge of the warning message content. In both groups, about 70 percent of respondents were unable to identify the specific theme of even one of the four Surgeon General's warnings (Richard, Fisher, & Conner, 1989). Moreover, a laboratory study, using eye-tracking methodology, found that the average viewing time of warnings amounted to only eight percent of the total cigarette advertisement viewing time. Furthermore, the warning was not viewed at all by 43 percent of subjects (Fisher et. al., 1989). This method provides two measures of label effectiveness. Because subjects did not pay attention to the warning label, it is hard to conclude that warning labels do not have an impact on the consumer's attitude.

In Korea, Cho (1999) found that smoking adolescents had more sensation-seeking tendencies than non-smoking adolescents and pointed out that sensation-seeking tendencies had a close relationship with smoking in adolescents. Cho et al. (1999) studied the influence of an anti-smoking campaign on smoking attitudes of college students. They found that an anti-smoking campaign had a more positive impact on the group that agreed with smoking than the group that didn't agree with smoking.

## Alcohol

Andrew, Netemeyer, and Durvasula (1990) conducted a laboratory study that exposed 274 undergraduate marketing students to one of five warning message topics: birth defects; driving impairment; hypertension, liver disease, and cancer; drug interaction; and addiction. Each of these warnings was either federally mandated or proposed in legislation.

They found that birth defects and driving impairment warnings were more believable than the other three messages. Also, attitudes toward the birth defects' message were more approving than for the other four warning labels. These results may be due to the effect of the message, source or both message and source.

Ducoffe (1990) studied the impact of warning labels in televised alcoholic beverage commercials. A sample of 445 undergraduate students watched a 22-minute television program containing one alcoholic beverage advertisement. The results showed that audio-only and audio-video warnings were recalled more often than video-only disclosure. Over 73 percent of respondents who were exposed to the audio-video warning and 58 percent of respondents who were exposed to the audio-only warning could recall the specific content of the warning disclosure.

### Cellular Phone Use in Korea

According to the Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) in Korea, 27 million people use cellular phones in Korea, sixty percent of the total population (MIC, 2000). As cellular phone users increase at an even faster rate, so do questions about the risk that cellular phones cause (*Weekly Chosun*, 2000). Research suggests that the electronic waves emanating from cellular phones can damage the brain (*Weekly Chosun*, 2000).

Even though there isn't agreement as to the risk of cellular phones in Korea, experts have pointed out the adverse effect of electronic waves on the human body. In addition, they emphasize that reducing electronic waves is the best way to reduce the risk associated with cellular phones (*Weekly Chosun*, 2000).

### Source Credibility

The important elements necessary to create a persuasive public-health campaign are source, message, channel, and receiver (Atkin & Freimuth, 1989). This study pertains to source credibility. A source is identified as the individual whom the audience perceives as delivering the message. A source is effective when he or she is able, through personal characteristics, to persuade others to adopt a desired attitude or behavior change (Newcomb et al., 2000).

Theoretical considerations (McGuire, 1969) have focused considerable research on three subclasses of source variables, namely, source power, likeability and credibility. With health-risk labeling, credibility consideration is an important factor (Kelman, 1961) in a campaign because it focuses attention on source expertise and trustworthiness. Even though there are studies indicating high-credibility sources are not always more persuasive than low-credibility sources, it is generally found that persuasive effectiveness is examined by using a highly credible source.

Two distinct explanations why a credible source is more effective are as follows. First, credible sources may be in and of themselves more convincing. Second, credible sources may be more likely to attract our attention to the message, thus making us more prone to influence (Mullen & Johnson, 1990).

In Sternthal and Craig's 1974 study, a highly credible source apparently made the recommendations more acceptable and believable and thereby provided a more effective means of reducing the consumer's fear. Conversely, the low-credibility source apparently provided a less effective means of reducing the consumer's fear. Futhermore, Pallak, Murroni, and Koch (1983) reported similar findings. These researchers found that emotional product ads were more effective when they came from an attractive, credible source than when they came from an unattractive, non-credible source.

However, other research has shown that high-credibility sources are not always more persuasive than moderate or low-credibility sources. For instance, if you are approached by a person advocating that nuclear power plants ought to be banned entirely, you may be more persuaded if the person is unattractive or moderate in credibility than if the person is attractive or high in credibility (Petty et al., 1996).

On the other hand, previous research has shown that warnings from authoritative sources are more likely to draw consumers than repel them (Bushman & Stack, 1986; Snyder & Blood, 1992). Therefore, the manipulation of source credibility (Minister of Health and Welfare vs. Consumer's Safety Institute) will be carried out to find the effects on warning labels. Often times warning labels are likely to backfire if the warning is delivered by an authoritative source (Bushman, 1998).

## Fear Appeal

The use of fear appeals has become popular because they have been found to increase the interest and persuasion of ads (LaTour et. al., 1996). The primary reason for their growing popularity is that advertisers have found that they increase the interest and persuasiveness of individual ads (Hyman & Tansey, 1990). In fact, empirical studies indicate that subjects better remember and more frequently recall ads that portray fears than they do warm or upbeat ads or ads with no emotional content (Hyman & Tansey, 1990).

The promise of relief from a negative event may also provide an incentive to accept the advocacy. Janis and Feshbach (1953) found in their study of fear-arousing messages and attitude change that fear appeal is based on the assumption that when emotional tension is aroused, the audience will become more highly motivated to accept the reassuring belief or recommendations advocated by the communicator (Cited by Petty & Cacioppo, 1996).

However, the relationship between the amount of fear invoked by an ad and the attitude change has been examined, results have been inconsistent (Snipes et al., 1999). Leventhal (1970) found that high-fear appeals were usually more effective than low-fear appeals. He argued that the high-fear-arousing message made the participants feel uncomfortable about their oral hygiene habits but the supporting arguments were not very assuring. In addition, LaTour et al. (1996) found that stronger fear appeals are more effective than weak fear appeals. However, Janis and Feshbach (1953) found that the low-fear message was the most effective in inducing students to practice good oral hygiene. They argued that the students became so frightened by the high-fear message that they avoided thinking about the issue (Cited by Petty & Cacioppo, 1996). Some research has found that invoking too much fear touches off intense feelings of anxiety, causing individuals to avoid the ad (Higbee, 1969).

On the other hand, on the basis of considerable research, fear appeals are most likely to be effective when the message is personally relevant, the fear is moderate and the message presents strong and credible reassurances about the effectiveness of the proposed solution to the threat (Rogers, 1983).

Therefore, manipulation of the message contents (degree of threat) will be used in this study. For example, in case of high-fear appeal, you are in danger of developing cancer (vs. recurring headaches) if you use cellular phones for an average of three hours per week.

### Use time

It was expected that a different use time of cellular phones would have a diverse effect on consumers under four conditions, such as high credible source- high fear appeal, high credible source-low fear appeal. Subjects were divided into three groups (low, medium, high) in terms of time spent using a cellular phone. It was expected that more use time could be transferred to product involvement. Therefore, use time was added to this study.

### Research Questions

Based on these studies, the following questions are examined:

RQ1. The main effect of source: Is there is a significant difference between believability and attitude for high and low credibility sources?

RQ1-1. Will warning labels with high-credibility sources be viewed as more believable and more positive than warning labels with low-credibility sources?

RQ2. The main effect of fear appeal: Is there a significant difference between believability and attitude for high and low fear appeal?

RQ2-1. Will warning labels with a high-fear appeal be viewed as more believable and more positive than warning labels with a low-fear appeal?

RQ3. The main effect of use time: Is there a significant difference between believability and attitude for low, medium and high use time?

RQ4. The two-way and three-way interaction effect of source and fear appeal and use time: Is there is a significant interaction between source and fear appeal and use time?

## Method

A 2 X 2 X 3 experiment was conducted at a southern university in Korea in July 2000 to test the research questions. All participants enrolled in the course received extra credit for their voluntary participation. Male and female participants were approximately equal in number. The 160 participants were assigned randomly to one of four treatment conditions. These treatment groups were exposed to different stimuli pertaining to warning labels. Individual group size was 13-15. After completing a questionnaire, subjects were divided into three groups (low, medium, high) in terms of time spent using a cellular phone that they responded.

MANOVA was used to analyze the effect of the two independent variables on the influence of two dependent variables such as the believability of warning labels and attitudes toward warning labels.

Because there are two types of source (high credibility and low credibility) and two levels of fear appeal (high fear and low fear), this is a 2X2X3 design with twelve groups. This study ensured that each group had sufficient sample size to meet the minimum requirements of group sizes exceeding the number of dependent variables. In this case, the sample sizes range from 13 to 15 respondents per group. This exceeds the number of dependent variables (two) in each group.

## Stimuli

Four types of stimuli were created for use in the experiment. In the case of high credibility, and high-fear appeal, the warning label read "Minister of Health and Welfare's Warning: If you use cellular phones 3 hours per week, you are in danger of developing cancer." On the basis of four conditions, the source (Minister of Health and Welfare: high credibility vs. Consumer Safety Institute: low credibility) and fear appeals (developing cancer: high fear vs. recurring headaches: low fear) were manipulated. After coding, subjects were divided into three groups (low, medium, high) in terms of hours of cellular phone use in a week.

## Procedures

At the beginning of the experiment, participants were instructed to read a consent form. Next, they were exposed to the warning labels on the advertisements and completed questions pertaining to their attitudes toward using cellular phones, belief statements about cellular phones, believability of warning labels and attitudes about warning labels. Participants were debriefed after the questionnaires were collected.

### Dependent Variables

Dependent variables were measured for believability, attitude toward warning labels and behavior toward warning labels.

Believability: perceived believability of each label was measured with ten, seven-point items based on Beltramini's (1988) examination of the believability of cellular phone warning labels. The ten items are: believable-unbelievable, trustworthy-untrustworthy, convincing-unconvincing, credible-not credible, reasonable-unreasonable, honest-dishonest, unquestionable-questionable, conclusive-inconclusive, authentic-not authentic and likely-unlikely.

The summation of three, seven-point items measured respondents' attitudes toward the label. These items were favorable-unfavorable, good-bad and positive-negative.

## Results

The average reliability of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha: believability of warning label, .93; attitude toward warning label, .91.

A pre-test was used to examine participants' perception of stimuli. The results showed significant differences in participants' perception of the high- and low-fear appeal: $t = -9.7$, $P < .001$. In addition, there was a significant difference in participants' perception of the high- and low-credible source: $t = -5.78$, $p < .001$.

In MANOVA analysis, the assumption of greatest importance is the homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices across the groups. In this study, there are four groups involved in testing the assumption. Box' M test has a significance level of .75, thus allowing acceptance of the null hypothesis of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices at the .05 level. The second assumption is the correlation of the dependent variables, which is assessed with Bartlett's test of sphericity. In this example, the significance is .000, indicative of a significance level of correlation between the two dependent measures.

The MANOVA model tests not only for main effects of both independent variables but also for their interaction on the two dependent variables. The first step is to examine the interaction effect and determine whether it is statistically significant.

The multivariate tests indicate that the interaction effect is not significant. With a non-significant interaction effect, the main effects can be interpreted directly without adjustment.

As shown in Table 1, the MANOVA results indicate the main effects of source and fear appeal. Fear appeal type has a significance level of .421 for the multivariate tests, indicating a non-significant difference attributable to fear appeal type. The second independent variable, sources showed significant effects for all multivariate tests.

To answer RQ1, the influence of source credibility on perceptions of warning labels, the believability of warning labels and attitudes toward warning labels for each treatment were summed, and the results of multivariate analysis indicated a significant difference between high-credible sources and low-credible sources: F(1,159)=4.03, p<.05. In univariate analysis, there is a difference between mean believability toward the warning label between high credibility and low credibility: F(1,159)=7.14, p<.05. Also, warning labels with high-credibility sources (M=44.25) were viewed as more believable than those with low-credibility sources (M=40.14). However, it doesn't have an impact on attitude toward the warning labels: F(1,159)=1.5, n.s. Also, warning labels with high-credibility sources (M=13.05) were viewed as more positive than those with low-credibility sources (M=12.50).

Overall, source credibility had an impact on two sets of dependent variables. In univariate analysis, warning labels with high-credibility sources were viewed as more believable than those with low-credibility sources. However, it doesn't have an impact on attitude toward the warning labels.

To answer RQ2, the influence of a fear appeal on perceptions of warning labels, the believability of warning labels and attitudes toward warning labels for each treatment were summed, and the results of multivariate analysis of variance indicated no significant difference between high-fear appeal and low- fear appeal: F(1,159)=.87, p=.42. However, warning labels with a high-fear appeal (M=43.17 for believability; M=13.19 for attitude) are viewed as more believable and more positive than warning labels with a low-fear appeal (M=41.21 for believability; M=12.37 for attitude).

To answer RQ3, the influence of use time on perceptions of warning labels, the believability of warning labels and attitudes toward warning labels for each treatment were summed, and the results of multivariate analysis of variance indicated no significant difference among low, medium and high time: F(1,159)=.69, p= .59. The mean of believability and attitude among the three use times are almost the same, as shown in Table 2.

To answer RQ4, the influence of the two-way and three-way interaction effect of source credibility, fear appeal, and use time, the believability of warning labels and attitudes toward warning labels for each treatment were summed, and the results of multivariate analysis of variance indicated no significant interaction, as shown in Table 1.

Overall, the findings suggest that one independent variable (source credibility) had an impact on two sets of dependent variables. In univariate analysis, there is a difference between mean believability of the warning label between high credibility and low credibility. However, it doesn't have an impact on attitude toward the warning labels.

**Discussion**

The present study sought to determine the effectiveness of warning labels about cellular phones in different conditions. In fact, there were no significant differences between high-fear appeal and low-fear appeal and among the three use times except for source credibility.

A plausible explanation for the non-significant fear appeal is that participants may not know much about the health risks of cellular phones, which also may not be personally relevant. Even though a report about health problems from using cellular phones is being publicized now, it is not familiar to subjects. In addition, subjects seek to find the scientific evidence about cellular phones, which cannot be a modest message. Scientific evidence has not yet been compiled. Because the warning label's message didn't present strong and credible reassurances about the effectiveness of the proposed solution to the threat, it may lead to no significant results for fear appeal dependent variables.

Warning labels also didn't have any impact on subjects whose use time is different. The fact that there is no difference in perceptions of warning labels among the three use times could be due to the following reason: The cellular phone industry is developing rapidly and consumers (participants in this study) have an overall positive attitude about using cellular phones. Therefore, warning labels might not matter to participants. As a result, this study failed to find a significant difference in cell phone use time based on warning labels.

However, this study found a difference between the high-credibility source and the low-credibility source as to the believability of warning labels. The high-credibility source (M=44.28) is more believable than the low-credibility source (M=40.07). This finding is consistent with previous research (Petty & Cacioppo, 1996), i.e., a high credibility source has a stronger impact on participants than a low credibility source. The source might be an important factor in making warning labels for cellular phones in Korea. Using a high credibility source might have a positive impact on warning labels.

Even though there is no statistically significance between high fear appeal and low fear appeal, high fear appeal might have an impact on the perceptions of subjects as to warning labels in terms of the mean score. It seems to be a consideration in making warning labels for cellular phones and should be examined in a more sophisticated way in the future.

The main limitation of this study is the use of student participants, who are not fully representative of general consumers. In addition, the experimental setting was artificial with respect to lack of context. In a true situation, participants do not base their decision solely on what they have seen on warning labels. Third, this research has not found that individual differences such as age, education and product preference mediate warning label effects. In this present study, however, the stimulus and student sample did not allow for the investigation of such individual differences.

Future research examining the effects of warning labels should attempt to reflect the use of a more representative sample and a natural environment. Numerous research opportunities exist for the study of warning labels. For example, research is needed for varying warning label legibility (e.g. typeface, contrast), configuration (e.g. size, design), and degrees of threat and exposure repetition. In addition, a product whose health problem has been shown with scientific evidence might be used in a warning label study.

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## Appendix

Table1. Multivariate Result

| Independent | Dependent | Wilks' Lambda | Univariate F | DF | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Source Credibility | Believability | .95* | 6.833* | 1/148 | .01 |
| | Attitude | | 1.447 | 1/148 | .231 |
| Fear Appeal | Believability | .991 | .446 | 1/148 | .505 |
| | Attitude | | 1.33 | 1/148 | .251 |
| Use Time | Believability | .981 | .041 | 2/148 | .96 |
| | Attitude | | .834 | 2/148 | .436 |
| Source X Fear | Believability | .997 | .491 | 1/148 | .485 |
| | Attitude | | .169 | 1/148 | .681 |
| Fear X Use Time | Believability | .977 | 1.522 | 2/148 | .222 |
| | Attitude | | .471 | 2/148 | .625 |
| Source X Use Time | Believability | .96 | .641 | 2/148 | .528 |
| | Attitude | | 1.67 | 2/148 | .192 |
| SourceXFearXUse Time | Believability | .987 | .696 | 2/148 | .5 |
| | Attitude | | .552 | 2/148 | .577 |

* $p < .05$

Table 2. Means of three independent variables

| | | Believability (Mean) | Attitude (Mean) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Source Credibility | High | 44.25 | 13.05 |
| | Low | 40.14 | 12.50 |
| Fear Appeal | High | 43.17 | 13.19 |
| | Low | 41.21 | 12.37 |
| Use Time | High | 42.08 | 12.23 |
| | Medium | 42.70 | 12.78 |
| | Low | 42.62 | 13.27 |

MC+S

# Word People vs. Picture People: Normative Differences and Strategies for Control Over Work Among Newsroom Subgroups

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# Word People vs. Picture People

Over the past 20 years, the size and prominence of newspaper art and design departments have increased dramatically, and newsrooms have restructured and retooled to accommodate the emphasis on news presentation (Gentry and Zang, 1989; Cooke, Banks and Turner 1993 ; Auman 1994; Wanta and Danner, 1997; Wanta and Russial, 1999). The trade and academic literature suggest these changes have introduced tensions among occupational subgroups in newsrooms, particularly between "word journalists" and "visual journalists." Editors have complained that "page designers are running amok," (Hansen, Neuzil and Ward, 1998) and news decisions are too often shaped by visual considerations (Underwood, Giffard and Stamm, 1994; Ryan, 1997). Visual journalists say they receive insufficient support from other newsroom groups (Gentry and Zang, 1989; Kohorst, 1999), that reporters and editors do not give them full professional status as journalists (Gentry and Zang, 1989; Moses, 2000) and that their opinions go largely unheeded (Sines, 2000; Wilson, 2001; Lowrey, 2000).

Much of the scholarly literature that addresses task differentiation in newsrooms assumes specialties prove functional for the organization (e.g., Solomon, 1995; Russial, 1998) or for the organization's community (e.g., Dubick, 1978; Griswold, 1999). Studies that do address negotiation or conflict within newsrooms tend to focus on differing role perceptions among reporters (e.g., Johnstone, Slawski and Bowman, 1976; Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996) or on negotiations among managers of news content departments (Blumler, 1969; Sigal, 1973; Clayman and Reisner, 1998) Yet in the portrait of the newsroom above, news work does not appear as a singular, monolithic occupation. It is instead divided into occupational subgroups that have their own agendas and compete with one another for legitimacy and for control over work. While newsroom subgroups do cooperate, the division of labor need not serve only functional and integrative aims. Subgroups are various, and many have an occupational dimension that reflects unique expert knowledge and transcends organizational boundaries. Photographers, reporters, designers and copy editors have separate professional organizations, conferences and publications, and distinct curricula in many journalism schools.[1] Cultural differences among subgroups should parallel these different occupational paths. It is contended in this study that members of different occupational subgroups share unique sets of perceptions, practices and values that give meaning to their work areas. Various sets of norms conflict and coalesce in newsrooms as subgroups struggle with one another for recognition and influence.

This exploratory study asks a number of questions: Which norms do members of occupational subgroups involved with news presentation observe and to what degree?[2] What are the patterns of acceptance or rejection of these norms among subgroups? By what strategies do subgroups attempt to gain greater legitimacy and control over their work? What is the impact of subgroup competition on work practices and decision making in newsrooms, specifically in regard to newspaper presentation? Newspaper presentation work is defined as the tasks involved in constructing the visual context for newspaper information, including the selection of images, and the juxtaposition and sizing of news elements. It is expected that decisions made in daily negotiations over space, image selection and even hiring will be shaped by the results of these occupational and normative clashes. The group that successfully defines what is normal for the organization should have substantial control over decision-making about work (Bloor and Dawson, 1994) – and therefore over the final shape of news content. One prominent organizations scholar puts it this way: "Organizations are tools; they mobilize resources that can be used for a variety of ends. These resources and the goals of the organization are up for grabs, and people grab for them continually . . ." (Perrow, 1986; pp. 12-13).

This study also helps fill a hole in the literature on decision-making in the news presentation process. While gatekeeping research has addressed the selection processes in editing work, it has less thoroughly focused on decision-making about story restructuring and layout. It is important to better understand factors underlying this process, as studies have shown that the design and graphical portrayal of the news have important effects on the way audiences interpret and remember news content.[3] Schudson (1992) suggests scholars of news construction and media work have too narrowly delineated the boundaries of news work: "Most research focuses on the gathering of news rather than on its writing, rewriting and "play" in the press. This is particularly unfortunate when research suggests that it is in the *play* of a story that real influence comes" (p. 14).

## Background

### *Subcultures and the norms of news work*

The current claim in the newspaper industry is that the "visual journalists vs. word journalists" debate is – or should be – passe. It is said that design and packaging should be thought of as a team effort by picture and word people (Storin, 2000; Russial, 1998; Auman, 1995), and indeed there is recent evidence of increased integration among subgroups (Auman, 1995; Utt and Pasternack, 2000).

## Word People vs. Picture People

In a recent ASNE publication devoted to news design issues Orange County Register editor Ken Brusic (2000, p. 9) voices a plea for cooperation:

> "Let's stop already with this talk about designers being inferior to other journalists. The revolution is over. You [visual journalists] are full citizens of the newsroom. . . Smart newsrooms will abandon the senseless struggle of visual journalist vs. word journalist."

Yet this subjunctive tone may obscure the factual. As is the case with most multiprofessional work organizations, news organizations may house a variety of occupational norms, and these are often at odds with one another. For example, journalists and news directors in TV newsrooms have been found to be oriented toward journalistic norms while the organization itself is oriented toward the entertainment needs of viewers (Bantz, 1997 [1985]). While most studies of task differentiation in newsrooms depict specialization of expertise as an organizational benefit, (Solomon, 1995; Russial, 1998), the existence of conflict among subgroups presents a challenge to this functionalist perspective. The negotiation process among subgroups can be competitive, as news workers "market" individual news stories and images, hoping to "sell" these items to decision makers in return for scarce space (Gans, 1979). Interdepartmental debates over goals and resources can have a substantial effect on decision making about news coverage (Blumler, 1969; Sigal, 1973).

The recent increase in numbers of designers and artists in newsrooms represents a potential invasion of non-journalistic norms. As Van Maanen and Barley (1984) suggest, occupational subgroups within organizations are not entirely organizationally bound:

> Although a position is organizationally created and sanctioned, the work that comprises such a position often has a history of its own and, therefore, a context that is not organizationally limited (p. 291).

Historically most designers and artists in newsrooms came from the advertising industry following the rise of modernist style and culture in Europe and America (Nerone and Barnhurst, 1995). Today many news artists and designers either worked in advertising or for popular magazines, or attended commercial arts schools.[4]

## Word People vs. Picture People

Textbooks and trade articles acknowledge a conflict between art norms and journalism norms in the occupations of visual journalism, and typically advocate adopting the latter. The following statements are examples: "The great visual journalist is . . . someone who knows that visual impact matters, but journalism matters more (Moses, 1999: 14); "Good design . . . emphasizes information and communication over art (Garcia 1993: 34); "All too often, particularly at newspapers, illustration serves as a lazy journalist's way out" (Meyer, 1997: 264). News managers often try to turn artists into journalists (Lowrey, 2000; Wanta and Danner, 1997), even as they lament the difficulty inherent in melding the two occupations (Utt and Pasternack, 2000; Lowrey, 2000).

Certainly graphics and design serve a practical purpose for the news organization by making pages more eye-catching, and much scholarship on news design has assumed this function to be dominant (Weaver and Mullins, 1975; Kenney and Lacy, 1987; Lo, Paddon and Wu, 2000). However some artists see their work as oriented toward organizational processes and needs, while others lean toward the less practical norms of the arts. Becker's (1982) "integrated professional" is a commercially oriented artist who adopts the value of the organization within which he works. He has developed "the technical abilities, social skills and conceptual apparatus necessary to make it easy to make art " (p. 229). Ryan and Peterson's (1982) "product image framework" model is similar to Becker's integrated professionalism. Within this framework, artists in organizations shape their creative works so that they are likely to be accepted by decision makers at the next link in the chain. Griff's (1960) "commercial-role artist," adopts the product image framework, defining his role as successful when "the requirements of the client have been met as parsimoniously as possible" (P. 231).

At the other end of this normative spectrum is what Griff calls the "traditional-role artist." The traditional-role artists values the inner expression of "God-given" talent (P. 230). He denies the conformist nature of his job and seeks to portray his work situation as free-from-restriction. Becker's (1982) "maverick" is similar to the "traditional-role" artist. Maverick artists find the norms of their conventional work world confining and diligently pursue innovation. They tend to get hostile receptions from "integrated professionals" because their work is difficult to incorporate into the normal processes of what is ordinarily produced.

In newsrooms art norms reflect a minority subculture – the dominant norms derive from journalistic professionalism. The nature of journalistic norms varies among scholars, although many say journalists attempt to acquire legitimacy and autonomy by observing the norm of objectivity. Walter

Lippmann said the path to improving journalism, and therefore public knowledge, lay through science and objectivity (Schudson, 1978). Journalists have the power to choose news stories "in exchange for leaving out their personal views" (Gans, 1979; p. 183) and for pursuing "balanced reporting of the facts," both of which are practical ways of pursuing objectivity that benefit the news organization (Soloski, 1997). Pursuit of objectivity is not restricted to reporters and editors. For example, photojournalists acquire professional legitimacy by ascribing to a "formal code of naturalism, preserving the objective aura cast around the photographic image" (Schwartz, 1982; p. 107).

Historically journalists have embraced the ideal of objectivity while doubting its attainability, but significant doubt of the value of objectivity surfaced in the 1960s (Schudson, 1978). Studies noted the splintering of journalistic roles, as advocate or "participant" journalists began to question the detached perspective of their traditional "neutral" colleagues (Johnstone and Slawski, 1976). While recent studies of journalistic roles have revealed a diversity of perceived roles, journalists have still said they highly value balance, accuracy and thorough investigation (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1996).

The constraints of the news organization also have a strong influence on journalistic norms and practice (Soloski, 1989). Tuchman (1978) argued that for reporters, "professionalism is knowing how to get a story that meets organizational needs and standards" (p. 66). News workers – both visual and word journalists – must adopt organizational norms to control and accomplish work (Roshco, 1975; Tuchman, 1978; Fishman, 1981; Barnhurst, 1994; Lowrey, 1999). Journalists internalize managerial norms and rules, which are implied but not explicitly stated, because managers fear contravening journalistic norms (Breed, 1955]). News organizations also view professional ethics as an economical way to control the behavior of journalists (Soloski, 1989).

### *Sociological literature on occupational competition*

Like other multiprofessional organizations such as hospitals and schools, news organizations may be thought of as incorporating various occupational subcultures. The members of such subcultures "seek to control their organizational destinies" (Bloor and Dawson, 1994, p. 285). Subgroups develop their own knowledge bases as well as codes and routines for constructing meaningful interpretations of the details of their professional world so occupational members can cope with uncertainty on the job. Both the knowledge base and codes foster group cohesion and serve to help an occupational subgroup legitimize its jurisdiction over an area of the organization's work (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984; Bloor and Dawson, 1994). The subgroup that most successfully defines the normative environment for a workplace gains greater legitimacy and control over its work (Abbott, 1988; Trice, 1993; Bloor and Dawson, 1994). A well-accepted premise in the study of the sociology of occupations is that the strength of an occupational group correlates with the extent to which it controls its knowledge base (Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 1994). Occupations that control their knowledge base, or can achieve "cognitive exclusiveness" (Larson, 1977) are able to define the context by which their work is judged.

Employees in these subgroups may be more committed to their occupational group than to their organization, and occupational groups can be a reference group and a source of personal identity. As Trice (1993) says: "Occupational cultures socialize persons into specific ways of performing a series of tasks, as well as into the values, attitudes, interests, skills and knowledge that accompany and justify them" (p. 145).

Van Maanen and Barley (1984) originated the concept of the "occupational community" by which they mean subgroup members who work within organizations, but "who consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work, who identify with their work, who share a set of values, norms and perspectives that apply to but extend beyond work matters" (p. 295).

Occupational groups may be brought in from outside the organization when it is perceived to be in the organization's best interest. This introduction of new areas of expertise may pose a threat to management and to other organizational subgroups (Trice, 1993). New occupational groups also form around new technologies (Abbott, 1988) which may be perceived as a threat by dominant organizational subgroups because it can have an empowering effect on the occupational status of weaker groups. Zelizer (1995) describes how reporters and editors in the 1930s resisted the new imaging technology of the photographers. Writers and editors, the newsroom's dominant professional groups, "did everything they could do to undermine [photography's] growing presence" (p. 83).

In an organization dominated by one particular subgroup, lesser subgroups may pursue a number of self-serving strategies. They may seek to identify themselves with the dominant subgroup's norms and values. They may also seek legitimacy through the demonstration of their own unique norms, values, knowledge and codes (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984; Bloor and Dawson, 1994). Members of occupations adopt "rhetorical strategies" to delineate their work boundaries, maintain control and gain credit "in the rough and tumble world of status politics" (Fine, 1996; p. 96). Power and discretion therefore result from uncertainty, and it is in the best interest of an occupation's members to portray their knowledge base as highly uncertain and difficult to acquire (Jamous and Pelloile, 1970; Nilson, 1979). Journalists have portrayed their own knowledge base as an indeterminate special knowledge that separates them from those outside the occupation (Tuchman, 1978; Schudson, 1978).

## Research questions and methods

The study adopts no specific theoretical framework but rather employs an amalgam of similar concepts from the sociological literature on occupational subgroups. It is posited that newsrooms house multiple occupational subgroups, each with their own areas of expertise, norms and values, and each with connections to occupational structures beyond the newsroom (schools, professional groups, workshops, etc.). These subgroups cooperate to some degree, and the division of labor is useful for news organizations. Yet subgroups have occupational dimensions that transcend organizational boundaries. Their actions are not always functional for the news organization. Subgroups compete with one another as well, and they seek to define the normative environment for the newsroom in an effort to build legitimacy and increase influence over work processes. It is this negotiation of the normative environment that is of most interest here.

This study is exploratory and employs an inductive, theory-building approach. It is designed to generate a better understanding of the nature of newsroom norms and the process by which subgroup competition and normative differences shape decision making in newsrooms. Concepts generated in this study should inform future research aimed at more generalizable explanation.

The following research questions were designed to better understand norms involved in the presentation process, under what conditions subgroups followed or challenged these norms, and the consequences of these normative patterns for decision-making about content.

- Which norms do members of occupational subgroups involved with news presentation observe and to what degree?
- How do different occupational groups of news presentation workers seek legitimacy and control within the newsroom?
- How do competition among occupational subgroups and the observance of different sets of norms affect daily decision-making about presentation in newspaper newsrooms?

Two methodological approaches – in-depth interviews and observation – were used to shed light on research questions. First semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 visual journalists: six newspaper photo directors, three newspaper art directors and eight newspaper design directors. Fourteen newspapers were represented in this convenience sample, with three pairs of design and photo directors deriving from the same papers. Most of the directors were from large dailies, with 13 of their newspapers having circulations over 200,000. Four of the papers have circulations between 80,000 and 120,000. Six of the represented papers were in the South, three in the Northeast, two in the Midwest, one in the Southwest and five on the West coast. Twelve of the interviews were conducted personally at a five-day professional conference of visual journalism managers. Five of the interviews were conducted over the telephone within a two-week period following the conference. Interviews were taped, and each lasted between 45 minutes and an hour.

Questions were designed to address the research questions, and probes were used that asked respondents to extend their analyses followed the questions. Interaction during conference sessions was also observed, and data were drawn from materials respondents brought to the conference, including examples of newspaper pages, written departmental goals, and written accounts of difficulties encountered by respondents in their daily work. Norms, considered to be informal social rules, become apparent from questioning about violations of these rules. Therefore some questions addressed violations such as the digital manipulation of news photos. As much as possible, interviews were grounded in the respondents' daily work experiences. This was accomplished primarily by looking at actual newspaper pages and by discussing the written episodes brought by respondents.

Transcripts were analyzed and responses were categorized as themes emerged. The process was not entirely inductive (as no process can be), as the researcher had some idea of likely normative behavior from the literature and from prior work experience as a page designer, and these expectations shaped the formation of the initial interview questions. Respondents were, however, allowed to digress during interviews, and the researcher adjusted expectations as new themes emerged.

The second methodological component involves observations of planning meetings from two of the respondents' newsrooms. Observations were made as part of a separate but related research project, the purpose of which was to examine factors causing variability in control over work by visual journalists. These particular two cases were selected because they represented extremes in the degree of newsroom influence possessed by visual journalists (in one newsroom visual journalists were influential, and in the other they were not).[5] Findings are useful for the present study because they shed light on the norms observed by decision-makers in the newsroom. These observations allow concepts that emerge from conference interviews to be grounded in real newsroom situations. They also serve as a check on the validity of the interview findings. It was expected that a richer conceptual understanding would emerge from a comparison of cases, as the pattern of norms and strategies for gaining influence should change as power relationships among subgroups change. Newsroom observations were each conducted over a period of five full working days and evenings. Numerous editorial planning meetings were attended, key personnel involved in the presentation process were interviewed, and the page design process was observed.

## Findings

### *Conference interviews*

Three major sets of norms guiding the work of newspaper presentation emerged from the interview findings. These sets of norms reflected, to some degree, the norms discussed in much of the literature. They are described briefly below and analyzed in-depth in the following section.

1) *Journalistic norms.* In the literature these norms typically refer to the pursuit of objectivity and detachment. To interview respondents however, journalistic norms represent the idea that textual content drives design. Following the norms of good journalism meant reigning in artistic expression for its own sake – for the visual journalists, there is an element of self-denial involved in the task of practicing journalism. Visual journalists were also concerned with portraying themselves as journalists in the newsroom. In order to follow journalistic norms it was perceived as necessary to *appear* to be journalists – as one respondent put it, to "talk the talk" of journalism. The norms of journalism were embraced at least as much for the stature they provided in the newsroom as for their traditional guiding principles (objectivity, accuracy, etc.).

2) *Commercial art norms.* These norms are two-pronged. As Becker (1981) suggests in his sociological treatment of art professionalism, for the commercial artist, commercial success is intertwined with aesthetic success. On the one hand art norms in visual journalism dictate that staffers value the visual aesthetics of a photo, graphic or a page. Self-expression and artistic "voice" are considered important and guide decision-making. But on the other hand, for an element or page to be aesthetically successful, it should also attract readers or catch the reader's eye. Commercial arts

norms derive from a minority subculture in the newsroom. Their observance can however signal an effort to challenge or sidestep the dominant journalistic culture and its norms of textual dominance.

3) *Integrative norms.* Integrative norms are similar to the organizational norms discussed in much of the news construction literature. The staffer following integrative norms values organizational efficiency, knowledge of work-accomplishing strategies and interdepartmental cohesiveness and consistency. These norms also dictate good fit between image and story and between subgroups responsible for their production.

Different occupational subgroups observed these norms to varying degrees. Presentation of the following findings are organized by the norm types listed above. These findings provide evidence of observance of norms, describe strategies by which groups seek legitimacy in the newsroom (in response to the second research question) and describe instances of subgroup competition on daily decision making (in response to the third research question).

### *Journalistic norms*

Managers at the conference most overtly and stridently embraced journalistic norms. Almost without exception, the values of accuracy and objectivity are spoken of with reverence and seriousness. These values are depicted as being fundamental, while artistic values are depicted as being somewhat frivolous. Managers either look for journalism school graduates when hiring, or they try to convert desk editors to designers. As one design director said, "the procedure around here is to move from news workhorses to high-design show-horses."

While journalistic values were seen as worthy of pursuit, journalistic knowledge (knowledge of stories, news values and news judgment) is often spoken of as being beyond the grasp of the visual journalist. Respondents revealed a need to gain the respect of the "word people." One design director said that editors and writers do not take visual journalists seriously: "At the news meetings you're in a room full of smart, opinionated people, and it's difficult to bring in an opinion that doesn't sound subjective." Visual journalists feel a need to learn the language of reporters and editors. Another design director said, "we've tried to build our credibility and clout in the newsroom . . . before we can make recommendations and expect people to follow them, we have to know how to talk a story." One West-coast design director said some of her designers lack confidence because of their lack of journalism background: "We work on getting them to articulate their reasons for designing." The language of journalism represents a barrier between visual journalists and word journalists.

## Word People vs. Picture People

Neither photo directors, art directors, nor design directors overtly embraced the concept of "art for art's sake." There was little evidence of Becker's (1981) "maverick artist" in their depiction of their personal roles. One design director describes his department as "newsy and business like." He says, "we try not to do anything artsy for art's sake. We try to be very content driven . . . we think news." An assistant design director for a Southern daily said that when hiring, they looked for designers who have "an appreciation for the content — the story telling aspect as opposed to ornamentation." A design director at another Southern daily said, "the most effective people here are those who have word backgrounds and can develop an art background . . . then, if they can move toward high design, that's a plus."

Directors referred to situations in which the perception that visual journalists were not *really* journalists led to loss of influence. A director at a West coast paper related the following episode:

> We had a bank robbery, and the bad guys shot these people. We dispatched a graphic reporter to talk to the police and sketch a scene. He comes back to the office, does his map . . . and the writer who was covering the story looks at the map, and says "no, this is wrong. The policeman wasn't standing here, he was over here." The writer played the power card. Typically in the newsroom, if there's an attempt to get at the truth, if you're going to believe one person over the other, you go with the writer. So they changed the map to match the writer's recollection. . . [it turned out to be the wrong decision.] The artist was distraught, wondering why am I being so disrespected?

While directors spoke of learning the language of word journalists, there was also talk of the need to stand up to word journalists. A West coast art director said her staff "works hard to gain influence over content." One director led a conference session on the need for advocacy by visual journalists: "Visual journalists are a minority. You don't grow up to be publisher if you're a graphic artist. Visual journalists must stand up for their rights, agitate, right wrongs and redress grievances." Generally journalistic norms were embraced with an eye toward gain in status within the newsroom.

Photo directors also referred to a perceived lack of respect, although usually as a past condition. Photo departments had been "service departments" or "button pushers" for word journalists, but now, directors say, their photographers are "visual reporters," the visual equivalent of word journalists. However, for these photo directors, practicing journalism seemed to mean accurately representing the stories the photos accompany rather than directly representing the world beyond the newsroom. The written representation was prioritized over the pictorial representation, and it was assumed that the reporter has already brought back the truth, or a close approximation. A vignette provided by a photo director from a Southwestern daily demonstrates:

> One of our photographer's went out to shoot photos for a story we were doing on a rundown old housing project just outside of town. He came back, and the photographs he showed me had a graphic quality that was stunning. The lighting was perfect. But it was clear the photographer had gone out and shot a picture for himself. It was just a graphic. It had nothing to do with the story. The photo should have reflected the story, because our photography should be, first and foremost for our readers.

A photo director from a large West coast daily said, "if there is a conflict between photo and story content, the photo editor's job is to persuade the photographer to pick the photo [that best represents the story] and explain why. Another West Coast paper's photo director explains their photo assigning philosophy: "I've always wanted to know what the story was about first in order to think about the best way to go about illustrating it . . . this is the approach we take here, and in most cases it works."

### *Commercial art norms*

Any autonomy possessed by photographers appears to derive from how they choose to illustrate a story theme. A West-Coast photo director says her best photographers are "artistic journalists – reporters with cameras who see in a unique, surprising way." A Midwestern photo director says, "The picture editor will go through a word process and tell him what the story is about, but for the most part they are the artists out there. It's their creation, what they want to communicate." Artistic expression has value to these photo directors, especially when supported by claims on journalistic norms.

It is important for photographers to have their own style, or their own "voice" as many of the photo directors put it. A West Coast photo director said uniqueness is an important quality to look for when hiring photographers: "I want to see that they have a personality in their style that sets them apart from all their others that I've seen." A Midwestern photo director said he is very familiar with the 'visual voices" on his staff, and he picks them based on how he wants the story communicated.

While in most cases respondents discussed the problems of digital photo manipulation in terms of violations of traditional journalistic values such as accuracy and fairness, there was evidence that a few managers rejected photo altering for aesthetic reasons rather than for journalistic reasons. An art director described his problems with one of the photo illustrations in his paper: "it looked hokey — it wasn't worked enough," while another photo illustration was considered acceptable because the artist "had talent for this sort of illustration." Several art and photo directors said they disliked masked photos (with the background cut out), not because they are less news worthy, but because the "technique is cliche" or because "that tool is overused."

Such aesthetic rationale was less often used by design directors, who tended to point to commercial justifications for their work. Design directors were more likely to discuss whether a page or graphic will attract readers than whether the page is aesthetically pleasing for its own sake. Many of the conference attendees' department mission statements included references to reader needs, such as "Lure the readers into the page," and "make the page fun to read." One art director described why cutting out the background from photos was sometimes necessary to attract readers:

> The artists believe the world is getting so much more visual, and there's so much competition. If you don't pull out all the stops and do all kinds of exciting, innovative stuff, people won't read the paper. . . People don't want endless rectangular photos and gray type. If you can integrate images and text more fluidly and more dynamically by silhouetting photos, it will make a more exciting page.

Some photo directors also seemed uncomfortable embracing the idea of art for art's sake. Often, when asked why they liked particular staff photos, photo directors discussed not the qualities inherent in the photos themselves – their aesthetic goodness, for example – but rather reflected on the photographer's ability to accomplish work. Comments from different photo directors included: "It was such an amazing picture because it was so hard to get," "it was a very nice photo for a situation that was very difficult," and "the photo was pulled off under duress and with an end quality that made it worth it."

The cultural trappings of the commercial art occupation, such as its opaque terminology, were sometimes employed by visual journalists to gain influence in the newsroom. During a conference session, several photo directors discussed how they and their photo editors intentionally used cryptic artistic jargon rather than arguments based on news judgment when discussing photos with news editors in order to influence photo selection. Other directors spoke of the need to "educate," or "manipulate," word journalists in order to influence the news-play process. One photo director from a Southern daily said he had instigated a series of photography workshops for reporters and editors in an effort to make them more sensitive to the needs of photographers and the emotive quality of photo images.

A photo director from a Southwestern daily described a unique way of employing artistic norms for gaining control. Several staff photographers had returned from a shoot in a war-torn African nation. The photo director had his staff pick the best shots and prepare a musical slide presentation, in which the images slowly faded in and out of black backgrounds to the dramatic score from the movie "Platoon." He showed the slide presentation to news editors in a closed meeting. "There was not a dry eye in the house," the director said, "and I got all the space I requested for my photos."

### *Integrative norms*

Visual journalists want organizational processes to operate according to the practical needs of visual journalists. They want, for example, to dictate the schedule so that they may more efficiently accomplish work.

Integrative norms reinforce the importance of internal consistency and cooperation (or acquiescence, depending on the point of view). In interviews and during conference sessions, directors repeatedly emphasized that visual journalists cannot do their jobs the way they need to without the acquiescence of word journalists — or as one respondent said, without "getting editors and reporters on board." Design directors, in particular, called for more and better coordination of the production process. One design director surveyed his staff in order to set priorities for a department mission statement. Number one on the list was "better planning." The director said the department needed to become more "pro-active with other departments" to achieve this goal.

An art director at a West-coast paper describes the staff's efforts at integration in the production process:

> The [business section] editors still aren't getting their stories in on time. We're on a campaign to straighten out the process here . . . The top editor has to come back from the old school. [She'll say] "This is a daily newspaper, dammit!," and she'll fall back on that when she wants to yank a story late. She hasn't come around on that yet.

Similarly, a West-coast design director said she planned to arrange regular meetings with the copy desk so that features-front headlines could be written earlier for illustrators.

Gaining control over planning processes involves negotiation skills. According to the directors, perhaps the most valuable asset a page designer can have is getting along with members of other departments. A design director for a Southern daily said, "Designers are putting the puzzle together, mending the fences. So we look for people who are positive, who can work with other people." Another design director describes her favorite staff designer: "He has a good rapport with other editors and photographers. When he goes too far design-wise, you can tell him so, and he listens. . . he's a pleasure to work with." Finally, a West-coast director describes her most valued staffer: "She has established valuable working relationships with editors who she works with, and to me that is invaluable. It's something you can't replace."

Designers also attempt to bring photographers "on board." One design director said the photo staff at his paper had formerly been a "maverick department," but had now been "brought into the fold." Several design directors said that relationships between designers and photographers used to be tense, but through "an education process" or "mutual understanding" relationships have improved. A design director at a Southern daily says photographers and designers get along well, but that sometimes photo editors don't have time to read stories and they will offer photos that "hang a left while the story hangs a right." A "good dialogue" ensues, typically resulting in photo editors choosing a photo that better illustrates the story.

Integrative norms require a fit between story and image. They also require that fit be achieved through a preplanned, collaborative process. The emphasis on good fit and smooth staff relations may at times be highly constraining. One Features design director said design at his paper was "not a true creative process," and that too much attention was paid to "what can we do that doesn't offend staffers at the table." Smooth relations among subgroups can mean more than content quality. A design director at a Northeast daily said "if the photographer doesn't like something I'm doing, I back off. My relationship with a photographer is more valuable than a design that is fish wrap by the next day."

*Newsroom observation*

The preceding interview findings were to some degree limited by the conference setting. Are the respondents' statements valid indicants of actual normative conditions in newsrooms? As mentioned previously, observations were made in two newsrooms, one in which visual journalists were influential, and one in which they were less influential. Findings from the observations are presented here in order to test, in a tentative way, the validity of statements made by interview respondents. By exploring episodes of presentation planning, the normative patterns discussed above can be examined in the context of actual newsroom environments. Comparing the normative patterns in contrasting environments should also enrich understanding. In one newsrooms visual journalists have substantial influence and in the other they have little influence. Normative assumptions about presentation work are likely to differ at these papers, which should shed light on factors contributing to variability in norms. Confidentiality was promised to the staffs of the newspapers. Therefore the papers are referred to as *The Daily Graphic* and *The Daily Text*, where *The Graphic* is the paper in which visual journalists have relatively strong influence, and *The Text* is the paper in which visual journalists have relatively weak influence.

Snapshots of the presentation processes at *The Daily Graphic* and at *The Daily Text* are presented below. These episodes involve planning meetings for the design and art for upcoming sections. In each case various subgroups are represented in the negotiations over presentation. Negotiations over section design offer evidence about the normative patterns among visual journalists in these actual newsroom environments.

One of the more notable features of the presentation process at *The Daily Graphic* is the degree of influence designers and photographers wield over early stages of the presentation process. These subgroups frequently set the parameters for discussion and premises for negotiation with editors. As *The News'* Features design leader said: "By the time fronts are seen, [editors] are just tinkering around the edges. Editors just make changes on the fringes." In contrast, visual journalists wield relatively little influence over planning at *The Daily Text*, as decision-making tends to fall along hierarchical lines – i.e., editors tell other staff what to do.

## Word People vs. Picture People

The episode at *The Daily Graphic* involves two planning meetings for a (then) upcoming news section on the Millennium. The first meeting, which included the design director, deputy design director and the photo director, involved planning for the design of the section, and the meeting was held in anticipation of another meeting these three would have with the section's content editor.

Meeting participants knew breaking news could be potentially important for this section, should any Y2K disasters occur, but they still wanted a well-designed section with visual impact. An effort, therefore, was made to design parts of the section so that format would not have to be severely adjusted for breaking news. To accomplish this, the deputy design director suggested organizing the section by theme according to region (one section for international news, another for national news, and another for regional news). He suggested creating areas for news briefs that could be wrapped around prearranged formats, thus allowing ample space for photos. If news changed, information could be put in brief form and "flowed in" to the space designated for it. Essentially the three wanted to create a design template that would constrain decision-making by editors and reporters. The Deputy Design Director emphasized that the three needed a plan before meeting with the section's editor: "We're not going to work into this plan a bunch of space for breaking news [text] that will make it easy for them to add more news content up front [i.e., early in the process]."

The three also agreed that the process of designing the section's cover and selecting local photos should take place away from the general newsroom gaze. The section it is acknowledged, is a "political hot potato," and they wish to avoid "too many hands in the pot." Editors, reporters and photo editors tended to congregate around the page on the screen and make judgments about design.

Later that afternoon a meeting on the Millennium section was held that included the section editor, the design director, deputy design director, photo director and the copy desk leader. The deputy design director laid out the plan agreed upon by the design and photo directors. The metro editor initially nodded approval, but then raised a perceived problem. Some of the section's material, he said, was not packaged closely enough with other related material. The deputy design director acknowledged this problem but made the point that packaging the material the editor wanted would be problematic because the material could not be counted on – it would arrive late over the wires from the West coast. The editor was still not satisfied, but it was agreed that this problem would be revisited.

A conflict then arose over story length. The designers told the editor that one of the stories, budgeted at 100 inches, needed to be cut. The editor complained that while the story might be long, it was "on target" in length for the section overall. The deputy design director and the photo director asserted that the space for art was insufficient. A designer at one point told the editor, "Hey, are *you* designing this section? . . . you have to have art if you want anyone to look at it!"

A compromise was reached. The editor agreed to cut *some* of the story, and the group agreed that more space should be sought for the section. Later that day in an interview, the section editor acknowledged the stalemate in the conflict with designers over space. "But," he said, "this thing isn't finished yet." Ultimately, a compromise was reached, but the basic design plans by the design and photo directors held.

In this episode, designers, in collaboration with the photo staff, drove the presentation process. Evidence here contradicts perceptions by respondents at the convention that the parameters of textual content constrain decision-making. In this case (and there were other similar episodes) visual journalists successfully set the parameters for presentation themselves.

The following episode at *The Daily Text* provides a contrast – visual journalists exert little influence over the planning process, and the meeting is notable for its relative tranquility and briefness. The episode involves a meeting held to discuss an upcoming *Daily Text* Suburban section. Attending the meeting are the Suburban section editor, who called the meeting, the dayside news editor, two designers, a photo editor, a copy editor and a reporter.

At the beginning of the meeting the Suburban section editor said she thought a story on a local quilting group should be the centerpiece for the section, and she asked the Photo Editor to display and talk about some of the photos for the piece. The Photo Editor lay six or eight photos on the meeting table for all to see. The Suburban Editor picked one of the photos as her favorite, and the Photo Editor indicated that this would have also been one of his choices. There was little discussion about presentation among meeting attendees, except when a reporter raised the issue that none of the photos displayed racial diversity. The editor agreed that this was a problem, and she looked at some of the photos that went with other stories to see if one of these would fit on the front. She suggested switching a story that she had planned to go on the front with another story that had art showing diversity. Looking over a list of story lengths and matching it to a schedule of available space, the dayside news editor raised a concern about what switching these stories would do to space configuration. This discussion between the editors continued for a few minutes.

Neither of the two layout editors contributed to the discussion. Layout configuration was hammered out between day-side editors and the Suburban section editor. There was little discussion in this meeting about the visual appeal of the section, as discussion of layout largely consisted of how to fit all available material into the section. In an interview with these layout editors after the meeting, they said they thought these meetings were a waste of time for them. "We just want to know what they want us to do." They said they did not need to sit through planning meetings to find this out. An art department illustrator made a similar statement about meetings for Features sections: "The editors are just going to tell us what they want anyway. It's not like I'm going to have a lot to say about anything during the meeting."

The Photo Editor in the meeting played a moderately significant role in that he set the parameters for photo choice by preselecting photos. In this meeting, however, he did not strongly advocate one photo over another, as he essentially agrees with the preference of the section's editor. In interviews both the layout editors and the Photo Editors said there is generally little interaction between editors, photo editors and layout staffs after these meetings. According to the Photo Editor, "The photo editors just give the designers the photos. There's not much discussion, usually."

## Discussion

Interview findings reveal a number of strategies employed by visual journalists to garner professional legitimacy in the eyes of others in the newsroom, and many of these strategies centered on the adoption or rejection of the sets of norms discussed. Newsroom observations demonstrated however, that the perception of norms and the strategies employed can differ depending on newsroom environment, and on which subgroups have successfully defined this environment.

Interview findings suggest that for visual journalists, word journalists determine what is “truthful” representation. Photographers refer to themselves as visual reporters, but existing story content tends to drive their decision-making. Page designers also value journalistic and artistic ideals, but they especially observe integrative norms. They strive for smooth production processes.

Integrative norms are sometimes adopted to resolve conflict among subgroups when journalistic and artistic ideals clash.

Newsroom case-study findings reinforce the idea that designers value integration of staff and good fit between texts and images. Designers are puzzle solvers, but not all "puzzle solving" is alike. Designers may solve the puzzle of a section's design before editors become very involved in the process, thereby undermining editors' control, as at *The Graphic*. Or, puzzle solving may be only a matter of tinkering at the edges of a design plan created by editors, as at *The Text*. Early collaboration among photo and design subgroups at The Daily Graphic also strengthened the clout of visual journalists in this newsroom.

Interview findings suggest journalistic norms were the most overtly embraced norms among the visual journalism managers, but they were also viewed as somewhat hard to attain. Both photo and design directors felt they needed to learn the language of the "word journalists" in order to establish credibility with them. The two newsroom case-study findings reinforce the validity of these perceptions. In order to control editorial decision-making, design and photo directors *at The Graphic* had to value journalistic principles enough to gain a knowledge of news and news judgment. They had to know which stories needed to package with others, which types of stories were likely to arrive late over the wires, and they needed to be able to communicate this news sense to the section editor. By anticipating and understanding the section editor's needs, they were able to successfully negotiate for more space for visual display. In contrast, visual journalists fell silent during discussion of news judgment during the meeting at *The Text*. For example only reporters and editors debated the problem of the racial diversity in the photos. As the respondents at the conference suggested, when visual journalists care enough to talk the talk of journalism, they can gain clout.

In the conference interviews, art norms were the most overtly rejected (they rejected "art for art's sake"). With no journalistic undergirding, "art" was considered frivolous ornamentation, and art norms were weak. Interview respondents said the cryptic "language of art" could be used to gain advantage when credibility in the arena of journalism was not forthcoming, but there was no evidence of this use of cryptic art language in the case-study findings. In the *Daily Graphic* meeting, visual journalists adopted the strategy of discussing the value of visuals in terms of economic gain (gaining reader attention) rather than directly in terms of aesthetic principles. Discussion about presentation in

*The Text's* meeting concerned fitting all available content into the section rather than the aesthetic quality of the section or the eye-catching nature of the design.

The ability to define integrative norms were highly important to a subgroup's ability to control the process, and these norms may operate as a form of social control within the newsroom. The case-study episodes offer evidence here. At *The Daily Graphic* visual journalists collaborated early, anticipated arguments based on news knowledge (which stories package, what stories are likely to break), and conceived a sort of design straight jacket which constrained the ability of editors and reporters to make late changes and disturb the visual format. Editors' willingness to comply with preconceived design formats suggested that visual journalists had at least to some degree defined the norms for workplace production, which as Bloor and Dawson (1994) suggest, is a crucial step toward controlling work. By the same token, editors defined the normative environment at *The Daily Text.* Layout editors and photo editors seemingly accepted the dominance of editors without question. They did not see the point of their attending planning meetings, and said they wanted to be told what to do. In both cases subgroups observed integrated norms – in both cases subgroups internalized the production needs of the organization. But the *way* the production process is carried out and the assumptions that constrain it are shaped by relative subgroup dominance.

One of these assumptions is the nature of the reader. In conference interviews visual journalists voiced an interest in using visuals for the purpose of attracting and pleasing readers (also evident in *The Daily Graphic* observation). Visual journalists have a stake in portraying the reader as a "scanner" or as "too busy to read," while one would presume word journalists have a stake in portraying the reader as interested in reading at length. Certainly the section editor at *The Graphic* wanted longer stories than the designer and photographer did, and the extensive preparation by design and photo directors before meeting the editor indicated they had confronted editors over story length before. Research sugggests that news workers tend to base decisions on the opinions of their newsroom colleagues rather than on reader opinions (e.g., Gans, 1979). It is easy to see, therefore, how negotiations among subgroups over the nature of readers may play an important role in the formation of the newsroom's dominant image of the reader. Where visual journalists have little voice, such as at *The Daily Text,* readers are more likely to be defined as word journalists would have them defined.

Who wins competitions among subgroups should have an impact on news content. For example, if a subgroup that is expert in the production of visual symbols heavily influences the normative environment of a newsroom – that is, if they control assumptions about reader needs or newsroom goals – readers may be more likely to receive a steady diet of short stories, abundant white space and larger visuals. Or if the normative environment is highly integrative – if it is defined by efficiency of process, consistency of content and goodness of fit between text and visuals – this could have an impact on the degree to which news content accurately reflects the world beyond the newsroom. In other words, the presentation of content could reflect the politics of the newsroom more than it reflects the "world out there." Almost 30 years ago Sigal (1973) discussed the importance of newsroom politics to content. He suggested front-page news represented a "three-way split" among news desks, and that this split was pursued for the purpose of reducing staff friction. He found the equity of this split remained little changed, no matter the news of the day. A similar situation could arise in decision-making about visual and textual symbols for presentation.

However, occupational and normative diversity need not be viewed as wholly dysfunctional. The cross-pollination of occupational norms and knowledges among these groups may serve to improve the quality of news. Staffers with more diverse areas of knowledge should be able to understand the overall process in a more sophisticated way. Designers and photographers who embrace journalistic norms and strive to acquire more knowledge of news events and understanding of news judgment may find themselves with a stronger voice in decision-making about art assignment and story play. This appeared to be the case at *The Daily Graphic*. Editors and reporters who understand the language of art and the constraints of production schedules are more likely to collaborate with designers, artists and photographers early in order to ensure that stories and images work together to communicate messages most effectively. Such collaboration should be even more important in technologically converged newsrooms.

This research is exploratory in nature. Further research conducted within newsrooms would be especially valuable and should explore the conditions under which different strategies are adopted by subgroups pursuing greater influence. Do factors such as organizational size and structure vary strategies or their chances for success? One would imagine that flatter structures would make power relationships among subgroups more egalitarian. Organizational size should also impact subgroup relations, as smaller organizations contain fewer areas of work specialization. Corporate ownership and availability of resources would likely play a role in the power relationships among subgroups. For example, a paper with tight resources might be forced to restrict space for graphics, thus weakening the hand of visual journalists. Such research could produce concepts on a variety of analytical levels that could be tested for generalizability.

More needs to be done to study the organizational cultures and occupational competition within media organizations. There is a large and growing literature on organizational culture in the sociology of organizations that may provide valuable frameworks for analyzing media work, decision making and production. This organizational culture approach would be useful in studies of the juxtaposition of online journalists and traditional journalists in newsrooms. Anecdotal evidence from trade industry literature indicates newsrooms have experienced culture clashes between technologically-oriented news workers and traditional print (and broadcast) journalists (Lanson, 2000; Paul, 1999).

In addition, sociological literature on work that focuses on competition among occupational specialties — for example, Abbott's system of professions —also holds promise for the study of media construction. While media work is undoubtedly strongly influenced by organizational needs, the products of media work represent more than the organizational division of labor. They also represent specialized bodies of knowledge and shared practices, norms and values that transcend the boundaries of single organizations.

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[1] Designers and news artists have the Society for News Design, the membership of which has grown from 200 at its inception to almost 3,000 today. Over 2,000 photojournalists are members of the National Press Photographers Association, and copy editors formed the American Copy Editors Society in 1997, with a present membership of over 1,500. These organizations also have student chapters. Most college-level journalism programs offer photojournalism courses, and many offer sequences (Smith and Mendelson, 1996). A growing number of schools are planning visual communication sequences and new media sequences as well (Becker, Kosicki, Lowrey, Prine and Punathambekar, 2000).

[2] Norms in this study are seen as "specifying what the members [of a group] or other [people] should do, ought to do, are expected to, under given circumstances." This definition comes from Homans (1950), who places norms "in the minds of individuals." This study takes a more sociological view of norms, adopting Durkheim's (1984 [1893]) notion that norms are not housed in individual minds. They are rather informal social rules, or "social facts" that become evident when

violated. Homans' definition, however, is helpful for its allusion to "given circumstances," which emphasizes the importance of variability in environment to the relative strength of norms.

[3] Research shows that variability in news design and image juxtaposition affects interpretation of news content (e.g., Culbertson, 1969, 1974; Wanta, 1988; Pasternack and Utt, 1986; Middlestadt and Barnhurst, 1999). Studies show that images create more memorable impressions on readers and aid recall (Stark and Hollander, 1990; Griffin and Stevenson, 1996, 1994; David, 1998). Studies also show that readers "scan" rather than read stories in detail (Garcia and Stark, 1991), and that graphics and photos attract readers (Kelly, 1990; Garcia and Stark, 1991; Lott, 1994).

[4] In a recent survey of design directors at large U.S. dailies, Lowrey (2000) found that almost the same number of design directors and designers had art educations as journalism educations. In addition, 65.7 percent of design directors said an art background was important for hires to have, while 44.8 percent said a journalism background was important. Utt and Pasternack (2000) found that among infographic artists, 35.8 percent have a news/journalism background while 28.3 percent have an art background, and 25.6 percent have a combined background.

[5] Cases were selected according to professionally-based criteria. Experts in major professional organizations for newspaper design were consulted, and major news design awards won by papers over the last three years were counted. The newspaper with stronger design received 13 awards in 1999, 22 awards in 1998 and 13 awards in 1997. The 22 awards in 1998 was the second most won by any U.S. newspaper in its circulation category. The paper with weaker design won no awards in 1999, two awards in 1998 and no awards in 1997.

In selecting the two papers, the researcher attempted to hold a number of potentially confounding variables constant. The two papers have almost identical daily weekday circulation (228,144 for *The Text* and 243,818 for *The Graphic*), and they are both daily morning newspapers. At the Text, the newsroom had 242 staffers, while at the Graphic, the newsroom had 278 staffers. Each newspaper is located in the inland, upper region of the Southeastern United States, and the 1999 MSA population sizes of each city are comparable, at 1,005,849 for *The Text* and 1,399,126 for *The Graphic*, by U.S. Census Bureau estimates. Each of the two newspapers is also owned by a large corporation that has a large number of other newspaper holdings.

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# Better Informed, No Say: Internet News Use and Political Efficacy

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<Abstract>

At the apogee of democracy, the decline of political efficacy is regarded as one of the most prominent problems. Given that the essence of democracy is citizens' autonomous control over political decision making and trust in representative government, restoration of political efficacy is an urgent concern to both policymakers and academic researchers. Embracing normative concerns, many scholars pay attention to the Internet as a new form of news media, expecting Internet news use to play a role in restoring political efficacy. However, few studies have tapped the relationship between Internet use and political efficacy with earnest theory and method.

By differentiating the sub-concepts of political efficacy, that is, internal and external political efficacy, and by looking at the distinctive features of the Internet as a new form of news media, the present paper explored the relationship between Internet news use and political efficacy. Using survey data, the present study examined whether Internet news use enhanced internal and external political efficacy. The study found that Internet news use uniquely contributed to increases in internal political efficacy, even after controlling for basic possible explanatory variables such as traditional news media use. However, Internet news use did not make a contribution to an increased level of external political efficacy. Implications of the results were discussed.

Key words: the Internet, internal political efficacy, external political efficacy

## Better Informed, No Say: Internet News Use and Political Efficacy

Paradoxically, at the apogee of democracy, loss of confidence and erosion of faith (Dogan, 1997) in the American political system is raised as the most serious issue facing the country (e.g., Lipset & Schniether, 1987). A recent national survey (Council for Excellence in Government, 1999) found that 64 percept of Americans feel disconnected from government. In addition, people feel powerless to influence the political system, complaining that politics is too complicated to understand. In the 1994 American National Election Study (ANES), almost 65 percent of people agreed that they do not understand what is going on politics (Bennett, 1997).

Widespread feelings of powerlessness and cynicism are a major concern to democracy. Given that the essence of democracy is citizens' autonomous control over political decision making, a subjective feeling of competence exemplifies the belief that citizens are the best judges of their own interest. Unless citizens feel that they are locus of control and that they are qualified to participate in the democratic process, their commitment to a democratic government rings hollow. In addition, trust in the government and the political system is crucial for representative democracy. If citizens think politicians and officials are not responsive and if they cannot trust their representatives and the political system, representative democracy itself could not be sustained and will be called into a question. By these reasons, withering sense of political competence and confidence--so-called, political efficacy (Abramson, 1983; Almond & Verba, 1989; Campbell, Gurin & Miller, 1954; Renshon, 1974)-- is worthy of notice.

Embracing this normative concern, restoring political efficacy is a key issue in the era of erosion of political confidence. Many political communication researchers have tried to find the cause and treatment of the wane of political efficacy. Public policy makers have pondered how to motivate citizens and give them the means to participate in politics.

In line with this effort, exponential growth in use of the Internet is drawing the attention of policymakers and researchers. According to a recent survey (Nie & Erbring, 2000) more than 55 percent of Americans have access to the Internet, with over a third of wired Americans going on-line five or more hours a week. Young Americans--8-29 years old--are particularly likely to access the Internet as a useful source of political information. Indeed, this age group sees the Internet as the most useful source of political information, outstripping television news, newspapers, radio, magazines, personal conversations, and direct mail (Project Vote Smart, 2000).

Policymakers and researchers are also excited by the Internet as a new form of news media. News on the web is growing strikingly from 20 sites in 1993 to more than 1,500 sites in U.S in 1997 (Davis, 1999). Over 457 online newspapers update the content at least daily (Meyer, 1998). Around the world, more than 4,000 newspapers were available on the Internet in 1998 (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2000). Given this, policymakers and researchers expect that the Internet as a news medium might change citizens' political attitudes and behavior, including their political efficacy.

Still, the relationship between use of Internet news use and political efficacy has not been seriously examined. Few studies theoretically and empirically have linkied Internet use with political efficacy. Even the few studies including a political efficacy variable in their broad Internet studies have rendered inconsistent results. While some studies have found a positive relationship (e.g., Boncheck et al., 1996; Hill & Hughes, 1998), others have reported a negative relationship between Internet use and political efficacy (e.g., Johnson & Kaye, 1998).

One reason for these inconsistent results may be an inconsistent conceptualization of political efficacy. Studies on the relationship between political efficacy and Internet news use have simply defined political effcacy as monolithic concept. They considered politcal efficacy either as only a subjective feeling of competence (e.g., Boncheck et al., 1996) or as broader mixed concept such as feeling of making politics different (e.g., Johnson & Kaye, 1998) without differentiating the two sub-concepts (i.e., internal and external political efficacy) that underlie the broader concept of political efficacy. However, the political science literatures have argued that internal and external political efficacies are different, showing empirical evidences (e.g., Acock, Clarke, & Stewart, 1985)

The present study will explore whether the Internet as a news medium contributes to a sense of political efficacy, measured as both as political competence (i.e., internal political efficacy) and as political confidence (i.e., external political efficacy).

## Political Efficacy

Political efficacy has been studied since the 1950s. The approach developed by Campbell and his colleagues has had a continuing impact on the manner in which these feelings are studied (Campbell et al., 1954). In the first study in this area, a sense of political efficacy was defined as the feeling that individual political actions have an impact upon the political process (Campbell et al., 1954). Subsequently, many political scientists and political socialization theorists incorporated the concept of political efficacy into their specific fields of study (e.g., Abramson, 1974; Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton & Dennis, 1986), although sometimes the concepts have been adapted to the specific research domain.

Unlike the unidimensional concept of political efficacy employed in the earlier studies, later studies suggested that there are two separate aspects in political efficacy, internal and external efficacy (Balch, 1974; Converse, 1972; Lane, 1959). Internal efficacy refers to beliefs about one's own competence to understand and to participate effectively in politics. External efficacy, on the other hand, refers to beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizens' demands. At the operational level, internal efficacy is often measured by the responses to such statements as "I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people (INFORMED)", and "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on (COMPLEX)." External efficacy is assessed by responses to statements such as "People like me don't have any say about what the government does (NOSAY)", and "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think (NOCARE)."

Internal efficacy, a subjective perception of the self as having obtained sufficient mastery in the political arena (Almond & Verba, 1989; Renshon, 1974), is based on a sufficient sense of personal control over the political process. According to Renshon's (1974) need-based theory, internal efficacy is the basic need of people to obtain control over relevant aspects of their life space, which under specified conditions includes the political system. If, and only if, citizens' desire for control is satisfied, citizens have the strong subjective feeling of political competence, that is, internal political efficacy. Given this, the desire for control over the political process and its satisfaction are key features of internal political efficacy.

Gratification of the desire for control, which comes along with a strong sense of internal political efficacy, depends on two sets of citizens' perceptions: expectations of political information and perceived potential manipulation. Taking Katz and his colleagues' argument (Katz, Blumer, & Gurevitch, 1974), desire for control generates actual information seeking as well as an expectation of information again, which eventually results in gratification of the original desire for control. Citizens' perceived possibility of manipulation of their political environment is another axis for achievement of the desire for control. As Burger and Cooper (1979) found, a desire for control is related to the perception of how the environment is open to manipulation. Regardless of actual exercising of control, a greater perceived potential of personal control over political environment is strongly related to a greater satisfaction of the desire for control, which would eventually induce a greater sense of self-control and self-competence.

Different from internal political efficacy, external political efficacy is more dependent upon the reality of politics. While internal efficacy is influenced by intrinsic motivation and information level, external efficacy requires citizens' perception of both the regime and the regime outputs in accordance with rules of the game in politics (Renshon, 1974). Only when the political system is perceived as responsive to citizens' requests do citizens feel a high level of external political efficacy.

Numerous studies have found that external political efficacy is negatively related to political cynicism and positively related to trust in the political system (e.g., Craig, Niemi & Silver, 1990; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991; Pinkleton, Austin & Fortman, 1998).

Measures of external political efficacy and of political cynicism are also often interchangeably employed in many studies. According to Austin and Pinkleton (1995), cynical citizens tend to distrust their political system and feel helpless to influence what the government does. Craig and his colleagues (1990) also found that distrust in incumbents is directly related to feeling of powerlessness regarding actual influences on the political system.

Despite its relevance, however, studies of political efficacy have not focused on identifying the influential contributors to both internal and external political efficacy. A few studies on the determinants of political efficacy (e.g., Eming, Hesse, & Fisher, 1999) only have looked at typical survey demographic variables such as gender, age, income, or education, ignoring other factors, especially communication factors that could have some theoretical significance.

Taking into account the nature of both internal and external political efficacy discussed above, the present study will give special attention to whether Internet news use will contribute to increases in both internal and external political efficacy.

## Internet News Use and Political Efficacy

In the face of a crisis regarding the role of traditional media in political efficacy, a number of studies expect the Internet use to enhance political efficacy (e.g., Hill & Hughes, 1998), even though little attempt has yet been paid to investigation in earnest. However, there is reason to question this optimistic view of the role of the Internet. General conclusions about the impact of Internet use on political efficacy may be hasty, if they fail to distinguish between internal and external dimensions of the concept of political efficacy.

and if they fail to explicate a detailed explanation of why Internet news use would affect a sense of political efficacy. It sees likely that the two dimensions of political efficacy, that is, internal and external efficacy, might be influenced differently by Internet news use.

Internet news use and internal political efficacy. As discussed earlier, internal efficacy is a subjective feelings of competence (Almond & Verba, 1989; Renshon, 1974) based on a sufficient sense of personal control over the political process. Given this, the desire for control over political process and its satisfaction are key features of internal political efficacy. It is also discussed that gratification of desire for control depends on two sets of citizens' perceptions, expectation of political information and perceived potential manipulation.

The Internet has several distinctive characteristics that could provide citizens with a sense of self-control over the political process in terms of these two conditional factors, expectation of information and perceived possibility of manipulation. The Internet carries greater amounts of information than do traditional media. Internet user surveys indicate that citizens also perceive that the Internet offers much more information. According to one of Internet user surveys (GVU's 10th WWW User Survey, 1998), 70.6 % of respondents are spending most of their time searching for information on the web, and they expect to find specific information. Supporting this view, the research has reported that citizens perceive the Internet as more informative and interesting than traditional news media such as newspaper, television, and radio (Crigler, Just & Greene, 2000; Johnson et al., 1998). Perceived communication and social utilities are also greater in Internet news use than in traditional news media use (Lin, 1994). Given Katz and his colleagues' argument that exposure to the media serves as fulfillment of citizens' needs for control over political process by disseminating political information (Katz, Blumer & Gurevitch, 1957), the large amount of information of the Internet would contribute to increases in internal political efficacy.

More distinctively from traditional news media, the Internet is regarded as widely open to possible personal control. Unlike traditional media, the flow of information online largely depends on Internet users. While audiences of TV and radio are typically passive in their use of those media, Internet users have much more room to select information. High levels of connectivity (e.g., hyperlinks) expand users' possible control over information flow (Kenney, Gorelik, & Mwangi, 2000). Interactivity also helps citizens satisfy a desire for control, which may eventually induce feelings of self-competence as suggested in research on the Internet (e.g., Davis, 1999; Garramone, Harris & Pizante, 1986; Kennedy Gorelik, & Mwangi, 2000). E-mailing editors or journalists is possible. Electronic polls are often presented as a way of expressing citizens' opinions. Discussion forums and live chat rooms attract citizens' need for more active engagement in politics. "Doing something" via Internet news may enhance users' perceptions that they are in control, which may, in turn, increase the sense of personal control over the political environment.

In short, Internet news use may increase internal political efficacy. Regardless of the actual exercise of control, distinctive features of the Internet such as greater amounts of information, higher levels of interconnectivity, and interactivity may encourage citizens to perceive Internet news as informative and open to control, which may satisfy their desire for control, leading to a subjective sense of political competence, that is, internal political efficacy.

Internet news use and external political efficacy. As seen above, external political efficacy is bound to the reality of politics. By definition, external political efficacy--beliefs about the responsiveness of governmental authorities and institutions to citizen demands (Converse, 1972; Balch, 1974)--relies on citizens' perception of political output (Craig, Niemi, & Silver, 1990). As shown in interchangeable measures of external political efficacy and political cynicism or political trust, external political efficacy is negatively related to political cynicism and positively related to trust in the political system (Craig et al., 1990; Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991; Pinkleton, Austin & Fortman, 1998).

Pondering the causes of low levels of citizen confidence in the political system, political scientists and communication scholars have pointed out corrosive news media as a major factor. The negativism of the news media--horse-race-reports, strategic issue frames--allegedly turn off citizens, creating apathy toward politics and the political system (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Nye, Zelikow & King, 1997; Patterson, 1996). As a whole, many scholars have charged that the way of presentation of news (i.e., tone and frame) in media is filled with negativism, and thus facilitates cynicism, distrust, and a lack of external political efficacy.

In reality, Internet news is not much different from the traditional news media, contrary to our expectation. Content analysis by Chan-Olmsted and Park (2000) showed that broadcast TV stations just expanded their programs into the Internet, by reassembling and repurposing. Seventy-five percent of online news editors have said the content on their web sites is identical or mostly identical to the content of the print version of the newspaper (Johnson, Bissel & Kelly, 2000). Using survey data of online editors, Peung, Tham, and Xiaoming (1999) also reported that the most two important reasons for employing the web for news is to generate income through advertising and to use an online version as a promotional tool for expanding access to their print products. Although the Internet has many technological possibilities, the providers of the Internet news do not exploit the technological advance as much as expected. Thus, the actual contents of the Internet are not very distinctive.

Rather, some researchers have argued that the content of the Internet are even worse than that of traditional news media. According to Davis (1999), negativism is widespread on the Internet, and even worse, for example, in the case of chat rooms offered by most online news sites. The news sources of online news are not so much different from news media or are more personalized, relying on government, officials, and political candidates' campaign sites (Kim & Kim, 2000). Credibility of the Internet is relatively low compared to traditional media (Pavlik, 1998), and the perceived credibility of the Internet among users is also relatively low compared to newspapers (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000).

Given that the content or outcome of the Internet is not much different from the traditional news media or even worse, it can be reasonably inferred that use of the Internet news does not contribute to an increase in external political efficacy. External political efficacy may be determined neither by quantity of information nor by media characteristics as communication channel itself. Rather, it may be influenced by actual contents of Internet news. Strongly supporting this prediction, Johnson and Kaye (1998) found a negative relationship between reliance on the web as a source of political information and trust in government as well as a negative relationship between Internet use in general and trust in government.

## Method

The present study surveyed 134 undergraduate and graduate students in a large public university, which was collected in 1998. Originally, the survey was intended to explore media use and general political attitudes. The advantage of the data is that the survey has questions of political efficacy, traditional and new media use (i.e., the Internet), and at the same time, specific kinds of Internet use.

### *Dependent Variables*

*Internal political efficacy*. A 7-point INFORMED scale (i.e., "I think that I'm better informed about politics and government than most people.") was employed as a measure of internal political efficacy. Originally, 1 was strongly agree and 7 was strongly disagree. For ease of interpretation, it was reversed (i.e., 1 was disagree, 7 was agree). The mean (*M*) was 3.77 (*SD* = 1.52).

*External political efficacy*. A 7-point NOSAY scale (i.e., "People like me don't have any say about what the government does.") was used as the external political efficacy measure. This statement was suggested by Niemi and his colleagues (Nemi, 1988) as a strong predictor of external political efficacy. One was strongly agree and 7 was strongly disagree, which meant that 1 was low degree of external efficacy and 7 was high degree of external efficacy. The mean (*M*) was 4.52 (*SD*=1.79).

### Independent Variable

Internet news use. Internet news use was measured by two questions asking the amount of time each individual spent in following news via the Internet: hours per day and days per week. The score was computed by multiplying the hours in an average day by the days in the past week, which indicated the total time spent per week. Mean (M) was .77 hour (SD = 1.82).

### Control Variables

Possible explanatory variables suggested by previous research, such as demographic variables, SES variables, party identification variables, political interest and knowledge, and traditional news media use were controlled by using a hierarchical regression method. The variables were entered as an initial block followed by 5 blocks.

Demographic variables. Gender and age were entered as basic demographic variables. According to previous research, males and older individuals are more likely to have a high sense of internal political efficacy, while they are less likely to have a sense of external political efficacy (e.g., Abramson, 1983).

Gender was treated as a dummy variable with male coded as 1 and female coded as 0. The sample was unbalanced in terms of gender; there were a larger numbers of female students than male students (i.e., female 64.9 %, male 35.1 %).

Age also was used as a control variable. It was calculated in months and treated as a continuous variable (M = 77.00, SD = 4.16).

SES variables. As the second set of control variables, social status and education were used. Higher levels of social status and education have been previously found to be positively related to internal political efficacy, while negatively related to external political efficacy in previous research (e.g. Abramson, 1983).

Social status was measured by self-description of the classes to which they belong, that is, working class, lower middle class, middle class, upper middle class, and upper class. Frequencies were respectively, 6, 8, 56, 58, 4 out of 134 students (two cases were missing). For easy comparison, the scale was regarded as an interval scale, of which higher number means upper class (i.e., working class 1---upper class 5). Even though there was little variation, education level was also included as a control variable. It was measured by an interval variable, from freshmen in undergradate to fourth year or later in graduate (i.e., 1 was freshmen in undergraduate---8 was forth year or later in graduate).

Political position variables. Party identity and political ideology were adopted as political position variables.

Party identity were categorized as three, Republican, Democrat, and Independent. The frequency of party identity was 23.6 %, 52.8 %, and 23.7%, repectively. Dummy variables for each parity identity were created. Political ideology was also employed in the form of a 7-point Likert scale. High scores meant conservative, low scores meant liberal, and 4 was moderate. The mean (M) was 3.46 (SD = 1.36).

Political interest and political knowledge. Researchers have suggested that political interest is the strongest predictor of political efficacy and political participation (Abramson, 1983). In the present study, political interest was measured by a self-description of the degree of following political events with a 4-point scale (1 was hardly at all---4 was most of the time; recoded). The mean score (M) was 2.32 (SD = .82).

Political knowledge was also employed as an explanatory variable. Eight items on basic and general political knowledge were utilized. The total score was calculated as a sum of the correct answer. Thus, the maximum score would be 8 and minimum score would be 0. The mean (M) score was 4.42 (SD = 2.20).

Traditional news media use. Newspaper, television news, and radio news exposure were employed as traditional news media uses. Each of them was measured by two questions asking the amount of time each individual spent in following news via online: hours per day and days per week. The score was computed by multiplying the hours in an average day by the days in the past week, which indicated total time (hours) spent per week. The means were 2. 88 (SD = 2.32), 1.92 (SD = 2.90), and .76 (SD = 1.82), respectively.

## Results

### Internet News Use and Internal Political Efficacy

As predicted, news consumption via the Internet had a significant relationship with political efficacy. Bivariate correlations showed that internal efficacy was strongly related to the amount of the time spent with Internet news ($r = .33$, $p < .001$) as well as traditional news media use (newspaper $r = .28$, $p < .05$; television $r = .35$, $p < .001$). Higher levels of internal political efficacy are also significantly related to higher levels of political interest ($r = .53$, $p < .001$), political knowledge ($r = .35$ $p < .001$), and being male ($r = .31$, $p < .001$), consistent with the findings of previous studies.

To examine the distinctive contribution of Internet news use to internal political efficacy, hierarchical regression analysis provided a more detailed picture of the relationship between Internet news use and internal political efficacy, by holding other factors constant. Variables discussed as control predictors, that is, demographic variables (i.e., gender and age), SES variables (i.e., social status and education), political position (i.e., partisanship and political ideology), political interest and political knowledge, and traditional media use were entered as each of the first 5 separate blocks. After entering these variables, the regression model tested the unique contribution of Internet news use to internal political efficacy.

Table 1 is about here

As seen in Table 1, Internet news use made a unique contribution when predicting internal political efficacy ($R^2 = .483$, Incremental $R^2 = .019$, $p< .05$). Internet news use was a significant predictor of internal political efficacy with a standardized beta coefficient ($\beta$) of .143 ($p < .05$). TV and newspaper also influenced on internal political efficacy (respectively, $\beta = .207$, .171, $p < .05$), while radio use did not ($\beta = -.013$, ns). However, the best predictor of internal political efficacy was political interest ($\beta = .328$, $p< .001$), which was already suggested by Abramson (1983).

Internet News Use and External Political Efficacy

As predicted, Internet news use ddid not contribute to external political efficacy. Correlations revealed non-significant weak relationship between Internet news use and external political efficacy ($\underline{r}$ = .079, ns).

Hierarchical regression analysis was again employed to examine the influence of Internet news use on external political efficacy. The same control variables were used to test the impact of the Internet on external political efficacy (i.e., demographic variables: gender and age; SES variables: education and social status; partisanship; political ideology; political interest; political knowledge; traditional media use: newspaper, TV, radio use).

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Table 2 is about here

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The results in Table 2 show that Internet news use did not make a unique contribution to external political efficacy, unlike the case of internal political efficacy. Although the model including Internet news use had a relatively high level of fitness ($R^2$ = .180), R-square was not increased after entering other influential variables. The magnitude of the standardized coefficient of Internet news use was also very small ($\beta$ = .022, ns), although the direction was not negative. Only television was slightly associated with an increase in external political efficacy ($\beta = .202$, $\underline{p} < .05$).

In short, the prediction that Internet use does not contribute to external political efficacy after holding other variables constant was also statistically supported.

## Discussion

Despite the small size of this sample of college students, the present study found sensible results in regard to the relationship between Internet use and political efficacy. By differentiating the two sub-concepts of political efficacy (i.e., internal and external political efficacy), the study could discover the each unique relationship between Internet news use and each sub-concept of political efficacy

The present study, first, found that Internet news use uniquely contributed to internal political efficacy. That is to say, those who are more likely to use the Internet news media are more likely to have higher levels of internal political efficacy. The distinctive technological features of the Internet such as greater amounts of information, higher levels of interconnectivity, and interactivity may mean citizens perceive the Internet news media as informative and controllable, satisfying a desire for control, which leads to a subjective sense of political competence, that is, internal political efficacy.

On the other hand, Internet news use did not make a significant contribution to increase the external political efficacy. External efficacy depends on the actual content of the Internet, rather than on quantity of information or on the medium's technological characteristics. Given that external political efficacy is determined by the actual outcome of the political process, it is reasonable to say that the actual contents of the online news, that is, negativism, personification, and relatively low levels of credibility may lead citizens to perceive that government and policy is not responsive to their needs. This implies that the Internet does not contribute to refurbishing the thinking, "politics is my job." Even if internal political efficacy increases, citizens still think that politics is "none of my business."

The question is what the present study's findings do impy. On the one hand, it would be a positive sign in the sense that people think themselves politically competent by exposure to Internet news. The findings in the present study suggest that Internet news use itself increases, at least, internal political efficacy, which is crucial to political autonomy in a democracy.

On the other hand, however, increased internal political efficacy without external political efficacy might mean a "pseudo efficacy effect", which might not be much helpful to citizens' democratic decision making. In the process of the analysis, the present study also found that there was no significant relationship between Internet news use and political knowledge ($r$ = .123, ns), although Internet news use uniquely contributed to internal political efficacy, and although political knowledge was itself a significant predictor of internal political efficacy. It might bring a pessimistic view that the Internet brings only a "pseudo" sense of being informed without actual knowledge acquisition. These findings suggest that it may be time to rethink what internal political efficacy means in the age of the Internet.

Moreover, the present study's post hoc analyis revealed that external efficacy was a better predictor than internal efficacy of political participation (in the present study, sending letters or electroninc mails to editorial or journalist). The standardized beta coefficient of external efficacy was .306 (p< .001), wheares that of internal efficacy was .242 (p< .01) in a regression model of political participation. Given this, an incarease in internal efficacy without an increase in external efficacy might not contribute much to political participation. Clearly, more research is needed in this area.

The gap between internal and external political efficacy caused by Internet news use, however, might be interpreted in a more optimistic way. According to Rosengren (1974), high levels of the need for personal control (i.e., internal political efficacy) combined with low levels of external efficacy might induce political participation, since frustration of a need in a relevant arena might bring more attempts to gain feeling of control. Austin and Pikleton (1995) argued that with self-competence and with a sophisticated understanding of politics, cynicism may increase the need for political participation, which might imply that the gap between internal and external political efficacy might induce more political participation. Further consideration should be given to this suggestion in future research.

Political efficacy, which has been forgotten in political communication research since 1970's, is now revisited. At the emergence of a new medium, the Internet, it is time to ponder again the impact of new news media on political efficacy.

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Table 1.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Internal Political Efficacy [a]

| Variables | β [b] | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male [c] | .124 | | |
| Age | .073 | | |
| | | .087 | |
| Education | .056 | | |
| Social status | .017 | | |
| | | .102 | .015 |
| Partisanship (Republican) [d] | - .110 | | |
| Partisanship (Democrat) [d] | .084 | | |
| Political ideology | - .030 | | |
| | | .140 | .038 |
| Political interest | .328*** | | |
| Political knowledge | .168* | | |
| | | .387 | .248*** |
| Paper use | .171* | | |
| TV use | .207* | | |
| Radio use | - .013 | | |
| | | .465 | .078** |
| Internet use | .143* | | |
| | | .483 | .019* |

Notes.

Coeffient entries are standard coeffecients in last model.

Parentheses are standard error of the estimates.

[a] N = 134.

[b] All beta coefficients are from the last model.

[c] Dummy variable (male = 1, female = 0).

[d] Dummy variables were used for party ID (Republican, Democrat, and Independent).

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 2.

Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting External Political Efficacy [a]

| Variables | β [b] | $R^2$ | $\Delta R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|
| Male [c] | - .120 | | |
| Age | - .183 | | |
| | | .037 | |
| Education | - .097 | | |
| Social status | - .111 | | |
| | | .048 | .011 |
| Partisanship (Republican) [d] | .073 | | |
| Partisanship (Democrat) [d] | .099 | | |
| Political ideology | .077 | | |
| | | .066 | .019 |
| Political interest | .137*** | | |
| Political knowledge | - .031 | | |
| | | .116 | .050* |
| Paper use | .060 | | |
| TV use | .202* | | |
| Radio use | .122 | | |
| | | .179 | .063* |
| Internet use | .022 | | |
| | | .180 | .000 |

Notes.
Coeffient entries are standard coeffecients in last model
Parentheses are standard error of the estimates.
[a] N = 134.
[b] All beta coefficients are from the last model.
[c] Dummy variable (male = 1, female = 0).
[d] Dummy variable were used for party ID (Republican, Democrat, and Independent).
* $p < .05$

Running head: MEDIA PARTICIPATION

# Media Participation: A Legitimizing Mechanism of Mass Democracy

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# Media Participation: A Legitimizing Mechanism of Mass Democracy

## ABSTRACT

This paper reconsiders civic involvement and citizen empowerment in light of interactive media and elaborates the concept of media participation. Departing from conventional notions of political activity that downplay the participatory opportunities inherent in communication media, we argue that new media/formats have, since 1992, made accessible to citizens a political system that had become highly orchestrated, professionalized, and exclusionary. A typology of active, passive, and inactive political involvement is presented to accurately distinguish civic involvement from political disengagement and to categorize the types of empowerment and rewards--both material and symbolic--that different modes of civic activity afford. Even if only symbolically empowering, civic engagement through new media serves as an important legitimizing mechanism of mass democracy.

After his career in public life was over, Thomas Jefferson lamented in a series of letters that the American Constitution he was instrumental in shaping "had given all power to the citizens without giving them the opportunity of *being* republicans and of *acting* as citizens" (Arendt, 1963: 256). Modern democracy suffers a similar fate. In the wake of the 1988 presidential election a Markle Commission study found that voters were increasingly resigned to occupying a spectator position and perceived campaigns to be more the property of candidates, insiders, and establishment media than citizens for whom the election drama was staged (Buchanan, 1991). Since the 1990s, however, the infusion of new media/formats into politics has altered the participatory landscape in important ways; with the possible exception of voting, most forms of active political involvement can now take place through new media (Bucy, D'Angelo, and Newhagen, 1999).

New media/formats rich in civic potential include the obvious, and much discussed, participatory venues--the Internet/World Wide Web, talk radio, call-in television, and electronic townhall forums--as well as entertainment programs that feature spontaneous, informal discussions about politics with both political and nonpolitical guests.[1] Yet the civic richness and growing accessibility of these new media/formats (sometimes called the *new news*; see Rosen and Taylor, 1992) does not mean that a vibrant, electronic republic will necessarily replace the existing world of traditional politics. Indeed, given the tendency of the traditional party system to normalize political activity, hopes for a radical transformation of politics, even in cyberspace, are likely to go unrealized (Margolis and Resnick, 2000). Instead, the new media's main contribution to political life may be to make accessible a system that had become highly orchestrated, professionalized, and exclusionary (see Dionne, 1991; Hume, 1991) and to produce positive citizen evaluations of the public sphere.

A previous investigation found that political audiences regarded certain new media/formats, especially call-in shows and the Internet, as useful and valuable to civic life (Bucy, D'Angelo, and Newhagen, 1999). This paper builds on the 'new media use as political participation' argument by specifying that this emergent form of electronic democracy, a type of political participation *through* media, involves not just Net activism, as recent works have addressed (e.g. Hill and Hughes, 1998; Schwartz, 1996), but the broader range of citizen actions that can take place online, over the airwaves, and through exposure to political messages that invite involvement. Such actions include but are not limited to direct leader/legislator contact, public opinion formation, participating in civic discussions and agenda building, mediated interactions with candidates and other political actors, donating to political causes, and joining mobilizing efforts--each of which may contribute to the psychological feeling of being engaged with the political system.[2] Collectively, we refer to this class of activity as media participation. Secondly, we argue that active and passive modes of participation (generally corresponding to new and old media) may be distinguished by the types of empowerment and rewards--both symbolic and material--that civic activity affords. We conclude by making the case that civic engagement through media, even if only symbolically empowering for the citizen, contributes substantially to legitimizing the political systems of mass democracies.

Before addressing the specific nature of media participation, traditional conceptions of political participation are examined to provide a context for the changing nature of civic involvement.

## Political Participation and Democratic Theory

Political participation is typically defined as direct citizen involvement in, or influence over, governmental processes. Thus, Verba and Nie (1987: 2) describe participation as "activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions they take." Conway (2000: 3) more specifically defines participation as "activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of government officials, or the policies of government." She notes that these activities may either be supportive of the existing politics, authorities, or structure, or they may seek to change current arrangements. Conway distinguishes between active and passive forms of involvement, as well as conventional and unconventional participation. Active participation, which is goal-oriented and motivated by the desire for a specific, personally rewarding outcome, includes such activities as voting, seeking office, writing letters to public officials, or working for a candidate, party or interest group. Passive forms of involvement, which are more ritualized and suggest a certain amount of detachment, include attending ceremonies or other meetings supportive of the government, being aware of government actions and decisions, or merely paying attention to the political environment, for instance, following campaigns and elections through the mass media (Conway, 2000).

Regardless of their exact form, participatory mechanisms are considered vital to the effective functioning of a strong democracy, in part because they are viewed as maintaining open access to the political system (Barber, 1984; Conway, 2000). Rather than burdening elites, classical theories of democracy place the onus of civic vitality on the citizenry, requiring popular interest and self-initiated participation in public affairs. The electorate, in the classical view, should not only be informed and judge political realities rationally but also engage in thoughtful deliberation, possess a democratic disposition, and consider community interests over individual concerns (Berelson, 1952). Systematic research has consistently revealed that these high standards and historically perceived requisites for democracy were not met or even approached by any western democratic nation, however (Cobb and Elder, 1983: 2). Instead of political omnicompetence, most people tend to have little interest in public affairs and few participate actively. Neuman (1986) and more recently Schudson (1998) describe the typical citizen as someone who is only semi-attentive to politics and politically unsophisticated but who, at the prompting of alert others or extreme media attention, can be mobilized into action.

Empirically, then, active citizen participation in politics, at least as traditionally conceptualized, is sporadic despite ample normative encouragement. In an analysis of political participation in the United States between 1967 and 1987, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) found the proportion of Americans who regularly voted in presidential and local elections was decreasing (down to 58% and 35%, respectively), while persuading others how to vote and contributing money to a party or candidate--indirect forms of participation--was increasing (to 32% and 23%, respectively). In addition, they found that only 34% of the American public reported ever initiating contact with a government official; less than that, 29%, had attended a meeting of a political organization (although 48% were affiliated with an organization that took a stand in politics.) Aside from voting, they conclude that there is no form of participation in which a majority of the public engages (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995: 52),[3] perhaps because voting, as

Neuman (1986: 176) observes, "is culturally defined as an important, symbolic, civic duty; active participation in campaigns and contact with political authorities are not." In the 1996 U.S. presidential election, an admittedly lackluster and noncompetitive contest, less than half of all eligible voters turned out on election day, the lowest turnout since 1924 (Nelson, 1997).

Evidence of scant political interest, knowledge, and participation among citizens has presented political science with the problem of reconciling democratic theory with reality (Cobb and Elder, 1983). Under theories of elite or stratified pluralism (Neuman, 1986), the dominant response to this theory-reality disconnect, low levels of interest and participation are accepted as normal and interpreted as a sign of general system satisfaction. Voting is still considered important because it helps insure responsiveness of elected officials. But much participation beyond this is regarded as detrimental because it may result in too many demands being placed on the system, interfere with the government's ability to act swiftly when events demand a quick response, and over-politicize social relationships. As Pateman (1970: 6) noted, "limited participation and apathy have a positive function for the whole system by cushioning the shock of disagreement, adjustment, and change" when groups that may not share the same values and norms as the majority press for recognition and accommodation. Low pubic interest also provides political elites with the maneuvering room necessary for policy shifts that may contradict previously stated positions. Popular participation, in this view, should thus be limited to elections; voters can control their leaders by voting them in or out of office but direct citizen influence on policy making between elections should be minimal.

Elite pluralism stems from the political writings of Walter Lippmann (1922, 1927), who felt that ordinary citizens were not competent to deal effectively with the complexities of political affairs. Lippmann would rather see society governed by a technocratic elite of experts who relied on scientific methods to rationally administer government than depend on the sentiments of a disengaged, 'phantom' public. Instead of prescribing that individuals actively participate in politics, elite pluralism thus places the onus of civic vitality on diverse and competing elites who should remain circulating and accessible to the masses. In theory, the ability of political 'spectators' in a pluralist system to enter the civic arena and become 'gladiators' in competition for resources or political influence provides a check on power holders and compels them to act responsively (Milbrath, 1965). Politicians and other elites may anticipate and proactively respond to potential demands not because citizens on balance make many demands but because political action helps to keep spectators from becoming active in the arena (Almond and Verba, 1963: 487).

Despite systemic constraints against mass involvement and genuine public disinterest in politics, the myth that widespread popular participation is desirable is nevertheless perpetuated because it is functional for the system. Milbrath has noted:

> It is important to continue moral admonishment for citizens to become active in politics, not because we want or expect great masses of them to become active, but rather because the admonishment helps keep the system open and sustains the belief in the right of all to participate, which is an important norm governing the behavior of political elites (1965: 152).

Responsiveness is also maintained through open channels of communication between citizens and elites, facilitated through such intermediaries as interest groups and the media, which "keep citizens informed of what public officials are doing and public officials informed of what citizens want" (Milbrath, 1965: 144). Thus, mass media, and in particular new media/formats with their two-way flows and open mike function (Crittenden, 1971), play a vital role in maintaining the perception, and reality, of system openness.

Should the system as a whole fail to remain accessible and responsive, the propensity for tyranny and abuse by elites not only increases but citizen faith, trust, and confidence in institutions may erode, precipitating a crisis of legitimacy. Before rise of the new media in politics, the political system in the view of many observers (e.g. Blumler, 1983; Dionne, 1991; Kellner, 1990) was experiencing just such a crisis. Among other reasons, American democracy had reached a critical stage because the necessary conditions for civic participation, namely adequate information, an accurate picture of public life, and a sense of citizen connectedness to governmental institutions, had been endangered by politicians and distorted by the press (see Bucy and D'Angelo, 1999).[4] Moreover, the rise of corporate lobbying, the growth of the political consulting industry, and the organization of civic life around media imperatives had served to marginalize the role of citizens in contemporary democracies (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995). By some accounts, the apex of this crisis occurred during the 1988 presidential election.

## The Legitimacy Crisis of 1988

Perhaps more than any previous election, the 1988 presidential campaign between then-Vice President George Bush and Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis harnessed the power of television to control candidate images and limit political discourse to sound-bite lengths (Hallin, 1992; Jamieson, 1992). The candidates, following in the footsteps of Ronald Reagan's success, restricted media access through carefully orchestrated photo opportunities that played to television's need for evocative visuals and assailed each other in misleading attack ads. Instead of voter interaction and candidate engagement with the issues, the campaign centered around negative tactics and 'dirty politics' (Jamieson, 1992). Image-manipulation prevailed and the candidates, who were effectively inaccessible to the public, sought to associate themselves with symbols of patriotism and leadership by speaking in flag factories and riding in tanks. In a post-mortem analysis of the campaign, Hume (1991) described how the sheer physical staging necessary to produce such visually potent events for a large press corps tended to distance local observers from the candidates as they campaigned, limiting citizen contact. "Thus, even the contemporary equivalents of a whistle-stop trip leaves those who actually come to see the candidate with a sense of distance and alienation--the feeling of being an extra in a feature film production" (1991: 10).

Determined to counteract the efforts of political handlers and guard against the kind of manipulation visited upon them by the Reagan-Bush media teams of the 1980s, the press responded to this image-making with a form of interpretive journalism that deconstructed campaign strategy and the machinations of event staging. Such strategy news and 'theatre criticism' reportage, perhaps as much as the staged events themselves, only served to reinforce the distance between voters and the power centers of campaigns, however, providing another barrier to participation (Hume 1991). From their analysis of television election coverage, Hallin (1992: 15) and Jamieson (1992: 4) extracted CBS reporter Bruce Morton's introduction to the Dukakis 'tank ride' story, revealing the media sarcasm with which staged events were met:

> Biff! Bang! Powie! It's not a bird; it's not a plane; it's presidential candidate Michael Dukakis in an M-1 tank, as staff and reporters whoop it up. In the trade of politics it's called a visual...The idea is pictures are symbols which tell the voter important things about the candidate. If your candidate is seen in the polls as weak on defense, put him in a tank.

Aside from Dukakis riding in a tank, the most enduring image of 1988 came from the Bush campaign's infamous black-and-white 'revolving door' ad criticizing Dukakis' policy of allowing prisoner furloughs. The centerpiece image of the ad showed a "procession of convicts circling through a revolving gate and marching toward the nation's living rooms" (Jamieson, 1992: 19). The ad intermingled in memory similar anti-crime spots aired by the conservative National Security Political Action Committee that broadcast the mug shot and told the story of furloughed rapist Willie Horton (an African-American), sensationalizing voter concerns about crime and exploiting racist fears (Jamieson, 1992). In terms of political symbolism, at least, Horton was paired as Dukakis' running mate.

Through acts of commission (e.g. painting a distorted picture of the political process, relegating public opinion to tracking polls) as well as omission (e.g. leaving citizens out of political deliberations), the political-media establishment had created a walled-off campaign that left citizens with a diminished role. In practice, Hume (1991: 19) observed, the public was "losing its grip on the democratic process." The public sphere had become more the domain of political professionals and advocacy specialists who dictated agendas than the province of ordinary citizens who constituted an increasingly passive and cynical public (Blumler, 1990). With the public all but shut out of their own democracy, politicians and the press enjoined in a vicious cycle of cynicism and fakery, contributing to a climate of mutual antagonism. After the election, political reporter Paul Taylor (1990: 250) observed that "the more cynical the news reporters and news consumers have become, the more image-manipulating, demagogic, and risk-averse the newsmakers have become. And so our cynicism begets their fakery, and their fakery our cynicism, and so on."

A diminished sense among audience members of the authority, relevance, and veracity of media contents and the increasing inability of many groups with a stake in civic affairs to recognize themselves in stereotyped media portraits prompted Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) to comment directly that Western journalism was indeed experiencing a legitimacy crisis. Failing a stronger commitment to democratic service, the media, they wrote, would continue to experience "pressures for change...from the present inadequacy of political journalism" (1990: 286).

## Origins and Implications of the New Media in Politics

Following the 1988 presidential election, political journalists entered into an extended period of self-criticism and evaluation beyond the regular campaign post-mortems and debriefings (Hume, 1991), committing themselves to reconnect citizens to the political process. David Broder (1990: A15) of the Washington Post declared that the time had come "for those of us in the world's freest press to become activists, not on behalf of a particular party or politician, but on behalf of the process of self government." The press' civic response was perhaps motivated as much by self preservation as democratic duty; as perceptions that political institutions and processes were inaccessible grew, much of this criticism was directed toward the media. Campaign journalism, once mindful of the average voter, had become increasingly evaluative and elitist, critics charged, and political actors, once hesitant to use advertising, came to rely on political spots and staged media events for message control (Hallin, 1992; Jamieson, 1992). These forms of one-way communication maximized campaign influence over the message du jour but limited audience interactivity, effectively silencing citizens in the process.

Whether due to frustration with the attack politics and event staging that characterized campaigns of the 1980s, the suggestions of influential, reform-minded writers like Broder, or the unique confluence of events and personalities that shaped the subsequent election, political actors and journalists alike took several steps to empower citizens and make public life more participatory in 1992. Surveillance measures such as ad watches were adopted to counterbalance misleading or suggestive ads. Public journalism projects were launched at small- and medium-sized newspapers, on National Public Radio, and public television stations, reintroducing the idea of citizen influence over the campaign agenda (Rosen, 1996). And, perhaps most theoretically interesting, new media/formats came to the fore, allowing candidates to address the electorate unencumbered by journalistic commentary and enabling citizens to speak directly to candidates.

Through focus groups and opinion polls, voters began to apply pressure for higher quality political news in the formative stages of the 1992 presidential campaign, expressing a preference for information pertinent to whether a candidate is qualified for office, namely, news about the candidate's personality, experiences, and issue stands (Buchanan, 1991; Graber, 1993; see also Harwood Group, 1991). What they got from traditional media instead was a heavy emphasis on process--campaign strategies and candidate rankings in the horse race--and scandal. Information about personality, experiences, and issue stands accounted for approximately one third of the coverage of the major candidates on nightly newscasts ('Battle of the Sound Bites,' 1992), with comments by the candidates amounting to just 12% of air time in campaign stories compared to 71% filled by reporter and anchor accounts ('Clinton's the One,' 1992). Reporters and anchors also started to appear on screen more often than the political actors under discussion.

Another factor pushing voters and candidates toward alternative formats concerns the structural aspects of television news production, which Graber (1990) argues mitigate against learning. Most television stories are less than three minutes (sound bites averaged 8.4 seconds in 1992); most issues are framed in terms of extremes, having no personal relevance to the viewer; and, there are few pauses within newscasts to serve as 'stopping points' for assimilating processed information. Graber (1993) accuses the prevailing format of most television newscasts of setting up 'learning hurdles' for the viewer. Story follows story or advertisement in "rapid succession, forcing the audience to make multiple switches between unrelated topics. Fragmenting stories into a series of brief, separately presented snippets makes it difficult to gain a good overview of political developments" (1993: 334).

Throughout the campaign, political actors responded to this sense of coverage-as-usual by traditional media by employing toll-free 800 numbers, infomercials, satellite uplinks, online services, and talk show formats to communicate directly with voters at length and circumvent media preoccupations and distortions (Ridout, 1993). In early June, when Clinton had fallen to third place in the polls behind George Bush and Ross Perot and was seen as increasingly irrelevant, he adopted an aggressive new media strategy. Over the next 30 days, Clinton appeared on ten nationally televised talk shows and markedly improved his standing in the race. By the end of June an ABC/Washington Post poll revealed that Clinton had surged ahead and was the new frontrunner. Electronic townhall forums, which arguably contributed to a meaningful campaign dialogue between candidates and citizens, may also have altered the election outcome in Clinton's favor (Ridout, 1993). After he won the presidency, Clinton said of the traditional press filter: "Anyone who lets himself be interpreted to the American people through these intermediaries alone is nuts" (Golson and Range, 1992: 14-15).

### Interactivity and the New Media

New media/formats that came to national prominence during the 1992 election, and which have been a staple of campaigns since, popularized the concept of interactivity in politics and have given audience researchers and political communication scholars a new perspective from which to work. A principal component of the new media is the notion of political interactivity, or mediated real-time feedback between political actors and citizens (Hacker, 1996). A primary feature setting interactive media apart from traditional campaign news coverage or political advertising is the potential for spontaneous interaction between political figures, journalists, and citizens (Newhagen, 1994). Rather than being proscribed a passive role in the political process, the electorate is symbolically or materially empowered (as discussed below) through the two-way communication architecture to interact directly with candidates. Although constrained by such structural factors as available air time, social conventions that inhibit extended conversations between people of high and low social status, and the sheer number of audience members (both in studio and at home) relative to political guests, interactive formats provide the appearance at least of an unscripted, unrehearsed civic discussion. If nothing else, new media/formats may cultivate the perception of system responsiveness, offering citizens the opportunity to engage in corrective communication with power holders. This form of mediated talk has the capacity to adjust elite impressions of mass opinion to better reflect actual public sentiment.

Given the time and role constraints on audiences, not to mention status and political knowledge differentials, full interactivity between public figures and private citizens is clearly not achievable even through new media/formats. However, a semblance or subjective sense of it might be. Some election research has found, for instance, that political television audiences may perceive new media/formats to allow for feedback, even if true interactivity is only partially realized, via the mechanism of perceived interactivity (Bucy and Newhagen, 1999; Newhagen, 1994). From this perspective, whether a communication event is regarded as interactive by an outside observer may be irrelevant if the experience of participation leads to a heightened sense of self-efficacy and system responsiveness in the individual.

Table 1 illustrates the distinguishing features of new media/formats and arrays them according to the number of communication modalities they possess, from most (the Internet/World Wide Web) to least (entertainment television).[5] Entertainment television shows are shown with the fewest modalities because they generally lack direct audience participation mechanisms and a real-time feedback loop that facilitates viewer interaction. Call-in television formats are considered more featureful than talk radio on account of visuals. Electronic townhall forums are distinguished from televised call-in shows by the presence of both a studio and remote viewing audience, either of which may interact with the elite guest depending on the format. Finally, the Internet/World Wide Web features the most choices and options, including all of the previous features as well as multimedia, or communication channel choice, which allows the user to select the message delivery method. The civic relevance of each new media/format is briefly discussed below.

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Table 1 About Here

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Civic Relevance of New Media/Formats

- Political entertainment television: Set in the casual atmosphere of an informal conversation or comedy skit, political entertainment television relies on interpersonal humor, insider gossip, and banter with celebrities and other high-status guests--frequently politicians--to foster a sense of parasocial involvement or illusion of intimacy with media personae (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Through the host's interaction with the show's guests and staff, or through the cast's acting in a bit, members of the audience are invited to feel that this sense of fellowship and social intimacy extends to them, fostering the perception of a face-to-face exchange about a political topic. Shows that feature political entertainment, such as Politically Incorrect, Saturday Night Live, and The Late Show with David Letterman, benefit from their parasocial character and accessibility but their interactivity is limited by the lack of a real-time feedback mechanism (other than applause from the studio audience). Recent surveys by the Pew Research Center (2000) have documented the information value of political entertainment shows, especially for young viewers, and during the 2000 campaign CBS broadcasted a weekly round-up of political humor from the late-night television talk shows. Since the 1988 presidential election the Center for Media and Public Affairs in Washington, DC has also tracked political jokes told on late-night television (the vast majority of which have been leveled at presidents or presidential contenders).
- Political talk radio: Perhaps more than any of the other new media/formats, political talk radio gives voice to the average citizen through its 'open mike' character (Crittenden, 1971). Talk radio provides verbal proximity to media and political elites, as well as access to a mass audience of fellow listeners, via the direct feedback of listener calls. By extending the voice, radio facilitates a sort of amplified conversation that may shape public sentiments and crystallize opinion on certain issues. Moreover, talk radio programs often deliberately attempt to mobilize the public to participate in civic affairs or contact officials (Hollander, 1995/96), serving as a vehicle for political socialization. For reception to be meaningful, talk radio listening requires dedicated attention with the intent of comprehending the discussion (Tankel, 1998). Listening, in turn, may teach the important civic skill of heeding and tolerating opposing arguments. Indeed,

Tankel (1998) asserts that a major attraction of talk radio is the multiplicity of voices heard on the air. Research on the talk radio audience has shown listeners to be significantly more civic-minded and participatory than nonlisteners (Hollander, 1995/96). Callers, in particular, are more likely to participate in other political activities. Talk radio can be best understood, Tankel (1998: 45) suggests, "as a behavior in which the listener is an active participant rather than as a process that constructs a passive recipient."

- *Political call-in television*: Combining the strengths of talk radio with the power of visuals, political call-in television places the viewer in the front row, if not of the political *action*, at least of the political *discussion*. Because of television's visual nature, this format invites close scrutiny of the political guest's physical appearance and nonverbal demeanor, perhaps at the expense of what's said. Importantly, call-in television endows the audience member with more sensory modalities--sight as well as sound--than the guest, who can only hear the audio of the caller. The disembodied voice of the caller is awkward for the elite guest and host but in some way empowers the caller because the transparency, though at a distance, is unidirectional. The guest is visually impaired, the caller visually enabled. Call-in formats thus provide visual *and* verbal proximity to elites, as well as open-mike access to a wide audience (although small by television standards). Public affairs cable channels such as C-SPAN and CNN, which feature daily call-in segments, "may well stimulate increased levels of political involvement or create new vehicles for political participation" (Frantzich and Sullivan, 1996: 246). Such participation has the potential for changing the climate of opinion and influencing the behavior of decision makers, while enhancing the political efficacy of citizens.
- *Electronic townhall forums*: Electronic townhall forums that feature a participatory studio audience, and sometimes an interactive viewing audience, offer a form of vicarious participation unrivaled by other media. For the home audience, the surrogate experience of viewing a townhall forum is intensified by the ability to witness the active involvement of fellow citizens, whose presence reminds viewers of their own democratic role and civic identity. In response to a citizen question during the second presidential debate of 1996 (which was conducted as a

townhall forum) about opening the political process to more grassroots involvement, President Clinton referred to surrogate participation and commented on the need to make elections more accessible through campaign finance reform and by opening the airwaves to citizen control: "You see, it's not just you that are participating here. For every one of you who stood up here and asked a question tonight, I promise you, there's 100,000 Americans that said, 'I wish I could have asked that question'" (Federal News Service, 1996). Through the airing of issues and questions that represent citizen interests rather than journalistic fixations--the two diverge considerably--the public debate is recast so voters come to know their own minds, as it were, before facing a critical choice and thereby have the opportunity to build "a more conscious democracy" (Elgin, 1993: 9). The visibility of citizen stand-ins who vocalize collective sentiment and concerns creates a sense of civic relevance that consultant-controlled campaigning all but obliterates.

- Internet/World Wide Web: Through convergence and remediation--the repurposing or refashioning of old media with new media, not just in turns of content but by incorporating old media forms into new media venues (Bolter and Grusin, 1999)--the Internet/World Wide Web introduces myriad ways to engage voters and facilitate participation in politics. As a civic medium, the Internet fulfills at least four political functions (Davis and Owen, 1998). First, it provides access to news and political information, frequently faster and more in-depth than traditional media. Second, the Internet links candidates and office holders with citizens through political Web sites. Third, the Internet provides a space for political discussion, especially through Usenet groups organized around various topics. And, fourth, the Internet can serve as a barometer of public opinion with the capacity of offering reaction to events and decisions in real-time (although, as Wu and Weaver [1997] caution, the validity of online polling is dubious). Quite possibly, the Internet/World Wide Web presents more political information and opportunities for civic engagement than has ever existed. The Web is a complex symbolic environment, however, and users spend a considerable amount of time just orienting to the medium. Before it becomes a true medium of the masses, questions of social access--the mix of technical knowledge, psychological skills, and economic resources required for effectual use of information and communication technologies--will have to be addressed (Bucy, 2000).

A question inevitably arises as to whether new media/formats allow citizens to influence the actual substance and outcome of politics. According to net activists (Schwartz, 1996) and some early confirmatory research (Bucy, D'Angelo, and Newhagen, 1999; Newhagen, 1994), interactive political experiences that occur in cyberspace, via cable channels, and over the airwaves, are deemed every bit as 'real,' useful, and important as their nonmediated corollaries--such traditional measures of political activity as attending meetings and rallies, volunteering, writing legislators, and contacting community leaders. And, citizen action through new media/formats already has had direct political influence in certain instances, as the talk radio furor over congressional pay raises and Zoe Baird's 1993 ill-fated nomination to U.S. attorney general demonstrated (Hollander, 1995/96; Page and Tannenbaum, 1996). Yet an over-emphasis on the traditional, political value of media participation risks losing sight of the more important *individual* consequence of daily citizen involvement with new media--the psychological rewards and personal empowerment derived from civic media use.

## Participatory Empowerment and Rewards

Beyond different modes of participation discussed above, a complete model of democracy should consider the types of empowerment and rewards, both material and symbolic, that civic activity affords.[6] Normative models of participation typically privilege direct or physical forms of involvement over indirect or mediated forms and assume greater empowerment and more tangible rewards for direct participation. Implicit in this assumption is the suggestion that effectual citizenship requires continuous active involvement in 'real world' politics. It may not. Instead, as Schudson (1998) persuasively argues, everyday citizens can serve democracy by monitoring the political environment for potential crises, actively intervening in civic affairs when events demand a collective response. Schudson's conception of *monitorial citizenship* comports with economic models of democracy, which stress the rationality of eschewing active participation given the high costs and uncertain benefits of traditional political activity (see Downs, 1957).

Moreover, *active* involvement may still only produce *symbolic* empowerment: even if citizens vote, volunteer, and write letters to elected officials, their *individual* influence over matters beyond their immediate purview is likely to be minimal and, therefore, largely symbolic (see Table 2).[7] Though active, such forms of involvement might better be thought of as *ritualized*. Indeed, Gans (1990: 537) has described voting as a religious act, for it rests on the premise that "no matter how clear it is that the individual's vote in many elections does not count because very few elections are decided by one vote, citizens want to contribute to a general will that will either give or withhold assent to a particular candidate or set of policies." So-called passive forms of participation may also produce symbolic empowerment and psychological rewards, such as enhanced feelings of efficacy, but not result in direct political benefits. Even so, a strengthened sense of efficacy can lead to more participation in conventional politics, thus influencing political outcomes (Kourvetaris, 1997).

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Table 2 About Here

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A passive, or indirect, form of participation that may result in material empowerment, or actual influence over political processes, is elite criticism of policy proposals, political actors, or governmental actions. Elite commentary can take a variety of forms, including media criticism and opinion pieces, think-tank or policy institute analyses, academic studies and investigations, interest group position-taking, and the like. Even though it remains an indirect form of participation, elite commentary differs from ritualized involvement in civic affairs by nonelites in its ability to influence wider political processes, as when leading politicians embrace a policy institute's recommendation (e.g. tax reform or universal access to e-mail) and introduce it as a piece of legislation. The material influence of elite criticism derives from the cultural-political authority and institutional credibility of elite actors, which guarantees that their opinions, findings, and intellectual output will find an audience. Books, articles, reports, and position papers issued by such groups as the Brookings Institution, the Heritage Foundation, and the Democratic Leadership Council, as well as leading academic researchers, exemplify the type of elite criticism that can result in material empowerment.

Tables 3 and 4 highlight different media that facilitate active and passive participation, along with the civic actors likely to use communication technology for political information and involvement. Traditional media, which are predominantly one-way in nature and encourage the type of passive participation discussed in the literature, are the primary information channels of the working masses and middle classes. They require the least expertise and activity of any of the civic media, although they may be demanding in their own ways, and foster a type of symbolic empowerment. More active and direct, though still largely symbolic in their effect, are new media/formats. Used politically by activists, political expressives, and members of the civic-minded public, new media/formats are distinguished by their two-way message flow and capacity to facilitate active participation. Like any communication medium, however, their impact to some extent depends on who makes use of them.

Table 3 About Here

Table 4 About Here

The bottom rows of Tables 3 and 4 suggest that online media may be utilized by political influentials and members of the monied classes. In addition to the Internet and World Wide Web, these groups may consult specialized publications with technical or proprietary knowledge--subscription newsletters and executive briefings in the case of political and economic elites, for example, and scientific and policy journals in the case of white collar professionals and members of the intelligentsia. The inactive columns on the right indicate use of tabloid and entertainment media by apolitical celebrities, socialites, and chronic know-nothings.

The civic rewards experienced by different actors in the public sphere are shown in Table 5. Passive participation without material empowerment may result in various cognitive and emotional (psychological) benefits, such as information gain, identification with preferred leaders, and the satisfaction gleaned from monitoring political events. Here, the uses and gratifications derived from traditional media use comes into play, although incessant monitoring of unidirectional mass media may, as Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948) noted, have a narcotizing or dysfunctional effect. In addition to psychological benefits, active participation may produce more tangible social rewards, including social status achieved through civic example, press coverage of pet causes, and proximity to material power. Passive participation with material empowerment may similarly lead to peer recognition, enhanced professional standing, and, under the right circumstances, media attention. The most potent form of civic involvement, active participation with material empowerment, holds the capacity to produce policy changes and shifts in governmental expenditures. At the opposite pole, non-participants may experience political alienation or apathy.

Table 5 About Here

In practice, active participation with material empowerment might take the form of large donations or fundraising drives for individual candidates or political parties, or lobbying efforts designed to influence the actions of government. Material influence in this instance derives less from cultural-political authority, as does elite commentary and criticism, and more from *direct access* to the political system, attained through financial donations, the cultivation of inside relationships, or political standing achieved by championing specific causes. Given the criterion of access, material empowerment is likely to be the province of political or economic elites, whether activists, lobbyists, policy advocates, or well-financed contributors. In addition to active and passive forms of participation, many citizens elect to remain *inactive* and decidedly apolitical--to the point of receiving only inadvertent exposure to politics through the mass media--and experience neither type of civic empowerment.[8] It is important to keep in mind, however, that participation without power is more associated with low socioeconomic status, while power with *or without* participation is more associated with high socioeconomic status; the rich have numerous ways of influencing politics, the poor very few (Alford and Friedland, 1975). Political influence depends not only on civic activity but class standing.

Figure 1 graphically illustrates the political pressure system as described above--the arena of political conflict where public alternatives are determined (see Schattschneider, 1960)--as a series of concentric circles. The outermost rings farthest from the policy-making arena represent the regions of symbolic empowerment where voting and media participation occurs. In this, the largest region of activity, civic participants may derive social and psychological rewards through various forms of participation that demonstrate the political system's accessibility, although involvement at this level typically has little direct influence over policy outcomes. Moving inward, the two circles closest to the policy-making arena in the middle represent the regions of material empowerment where influential civic actors possess the wherewithal to affect policy decisions and governmental expenditures. Note that both regions of civic empowerment, symbolic and material, are divided by a dotted line separating active from passive forms of participation. In both regions the white rings of active involvement are situated closer to the action than the gray rings representing passive forms of participation. Schattschneider (1960) estimated that probably 90% of the population did not have access to the inner core of the pressure system; indeed, most subordinate groups are denied full entry into the system and most participation occurs outside the region of material empowerment.

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Figure 1 About Here

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## Discussion

Elite theories of democracy stress that optimal civic conditions depend on a certain amount of citizen involvement but not too much as to cause instability. In direct contradiction to this limited view of public life is the democratic ethos, well entrenched in American society, that all citizens have the option to participate, regardless of whether their participation is healthy for the system. Fortunately for government, not everyone chooses to exercise their political rights. To the contrary, conventional public participation in civic life has been on a downward spiral for the past three or four decades (Putnam, 2000). During the same period, media use (notably television and more recently the Internet) has been on the rise, prompting some political thinkers to sound the alarm bell of social and political erosion (e.g. Robinson, 1977; Putnam, 1995). Conceptualizing new media use as a form of political participation that provides symbolic empowerment resolves the dilemma of civic decline; suddenly, there is a form of participation in which a growing segment of the public regularly engages. Importantly, media participation entails active civic involvement, not just passive surveillance of the political environment. Recognizing the value of mediated citizenship reconciles the desire of realists to keep public involvement in (actual) political affairs minimal with the admonitions of classical democracy's proponents for full citizen participation.

In contrast to passive spectatorship under a one-way communication system, media participation in an interactive environment presents the citizen with a civic role and ready avenue of involvement across a variety of communication modalities. Indeed, rather than being slighted by a form of 'pseudo participation,' as traditionalists (e.g. Kerbel, 1999) might characterize new media use, the citizen benefits from the awareness that media participation provides proximity to political elites, makes politics continuously available and entertaining (i.e. accessible), offers open-mike access to a wide audience, socializes citizens to participate in public affairs, and allows voters to cultivate a civic identity and know their own minds. For the electorate, regular involvement with media, particularly new media/formats, may well be taking the place of direct, sporadic participation in politics. Even if only symbolically empowering for the individual, the experience of media participation is pivotal to maintaining the perception of system responsiveness and thereby serves as an important legitimizing mechanism for mass democracy. Through the generalized occurrence of media participation throughout society, the political world has achieved a previously unknown openness. This should be viewed as a positive development: No other system of civic involvement and public communication seems to shoulder the needs of participatory democracy so effectively.

Except under unusual circumstances when the mass public becomes highly attentive to and mobilized over an issue, as with a controversial high-level nomination, new media/formats probably have little or no direct impact on political decisions. There is no guarantee, for example, that policy makers will pay attention to, let alone heed the advice from, an online discussion or instant survey. Often skewed and typically produced from unscientific samples, these 'public opinion' indicators can be highly inaccurate (although the results of a growing number of legitimate surveys are now posted online). The vast majority of media participation, then, may have no direct political impact except to encourage others to register their opinion. Nevertheless, new media/formats provide a public space for citizens to debate politics and express their support for, or discontent with, policies or a particular office holder without requiring any material response from the political system. This arrangement is advantageous for both the individual and the system. For the individual, the psychological rewards and peer activation that new media/formats provide may spur previously inactive spectators to initiate some limited form of civic engagement and motivate already active citizens to further their involvement, despite the wishes of those already active in the arena. For the system, media participation may enhance the perception of governmental accessibility and openness by, first and foremost, giving citizens the opportunity to act as citizens. Democracy thus benefits from opportunities for civic activity through media, even though citizen involvement by traditional standards is indirect.

Critics of media participation who view it as a watered-down or thin form of democracy should bear in mind that even conventional political participation seldom brings immediate results from government. Continuous involvement in civic affairs through media, however, may produce immediate and ongoing psychological benefits for the citizen. Although it has been presented as a theoretical proposition here, media participation has already been empirically associated with increased feelings of efficacy and conventional participation in studies of the new media audience (Hollander, 1995/96; Newhagen, 1994). From the skeptic's vantage point, new media/formats sacrifice certain forms of interpersonal deliberation for mediated versions and increase the potential for manipulation by political professionals. But the capabilities of the new technology can also be used to "tie individuals and institutions into networks that will make real participatory discussion and debate possible across great distances" (Barber, 1984: 274). Even if elections were conducted purely by way of new media, they would still be participatory in nature. At the very least, new media/formats expose elites to views and opinions they might not otherwise have heard and, in the case of electronic townhall forums, provide citizens with the sense of front-row participation that political correspondents routinely enjoy at press conferences (Barber, 1984). Rather than relying on journalistic stand-ins, citizens can question authority without media interference.

To the extent that media participation contributes to the agenda-building process of public issue formation, it may be *more* important to long-term stability than voting and other sporadic forms of conventional political activity (see Cobb and Elder, 1983). Campaigns and elections may fortify the short-term stability of a system, especially if they generate high voter turn-out, but their infrequent occurrence does not provide the ongoing, interstitial involvement that participatory democracy demands. Indeed, when the republic was young Jefferson expressed concern over the danger inherent in allowing the people "a share in public power without providing them at the same time with more public space than the ballot box and with more opportunity to make their voices heard in public than election day" (Arendt, 1963: 256). New media/formats satisfy this need for popular involvement by delivering a continuous stream of opportunities for civic engagement without overextending the government's ability to respond. The new media thereby increase the number of access points in the political pressure system, improving though not guaranteeing the likelihood that citizen concerns will be heard. By making allowances for continuing mass involvement, new media/formats serve the socially valuable purpose of bringing closer to reality the classical goal of full participation without over-extending already burdened political institutions.

## Endnotes

1. Examples of political entertainment television shows include ABC's Politically Incorrect with Bill Maher, MTV's Choose or Lose campaign specials, and Comedy Central's The Daily Show, on which former Senator Bob Dole regularly appeared as a guest commentator during the 2000 presidential primaries. These programs are categorized as new media/formats because they routinely provide the appearance of spontaneous interaction, they address political topics with nonpolitical guests in an unconventional manner, and they invite the audience to take an active role in the discussion, even if only in a reactive capacity. Moreover, these programs each have their own interactive Web sites that viewers can visit to continue their involvement with the show online.

2. The activities enumerated here roughly correspond to the four key transactions of democracy identified by Tambini (1999): information provision/access to information; preference measurement (referenda, polls, and representation); deliberation; and, will formation/organization.

3. Neuman (1986: 175) estimates that less than 1 in 20 citizens participate in politics beyond voting.

4. The "credibility gap" that arose during the Johnson administration's attempts to explain American involvement in Vietnam and the distrust bred by the Watergate scandal of the Nixon era are often cited as critical turning points in the spread of public cynicism (see, for example, Robinson, 1977).

5. Although they are arrayed by modality, new media/formats don't necessarily vary by level of interactivity because the perception of interactive communication is unique to the individual. Technology can set the upper bounds of message reciprocality, but the experience of interactivity ultimately resides in the user (Laurel, 1991).

6. Milbrath (1965) similarly observed that political participation can either be expressive (i.e. symbolic) or instrumental (i.e. material).

7. These tables are meant to conceptually differentiate modes of empowerment and participation, not to offer definitive categorizations. Undoubtedly, there will be exceptions; not every example fits tidily into its assigned category. The tables are more suggestive than demonstrative.

8. Politically inactives rank consistently low on measures of psychological involvement, feelings of efficacy, possession of information, partisanship, and civic-mindedness (Kourvetaris, 1997: 139). The media participation thesis is empirically supported by data that shows high levels of these traits among the new media audience (see, for example, Frantzich and Sullivan, 1996).

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Table 1. Distinguishing Features of New Media/Formats

| | New Media/Format | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Modality | Web | Townhalls | Call-in TV | Talk Radio | TV |
| Multimedia | • | | | | |
| Audience Participation | • | • | | | |
| Caller Feedback | • | • | • | • | |
| Visuals | • | • | • | | • |
| Audio | • | • | • | • | • |

Note: Audience participation incorporates caller feedback, which both the Web and electronic townhall forums may accommodate to varying degrees depending on the particular program.

Table 2. Civic Activities

| | Participation Mode | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Empowerment | Active (Direct) | Passive (Indirect) | Inactive |
| Symbolic | Voting, volunteering, letter writing, online forums, talk shows | Following public affairs via media; attending ceremonies | No events; only inadvertent public affairs media use |
| Material | Lobbying efforts, large donations, fundraising | Elite criticism | Attend galas and elite social functions; no efforts to influence |

Table 3. Civic Media

| | Participation Mode | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Empowerment | Active (Direct) | Passive (Indirect) | Inactive |
| Symbolic | New media/formats: talk radio, call-in TV, Internet/World Wide Web, townhall forums | Old media: television, radio, newspapers, magazines | Genre media: tabloid publications and entertainment shows |
| Material | Internet/World Wide Web, newsletters, executive briefings | New and old media, plus scientific and policy journals | High-brow entertainment media |

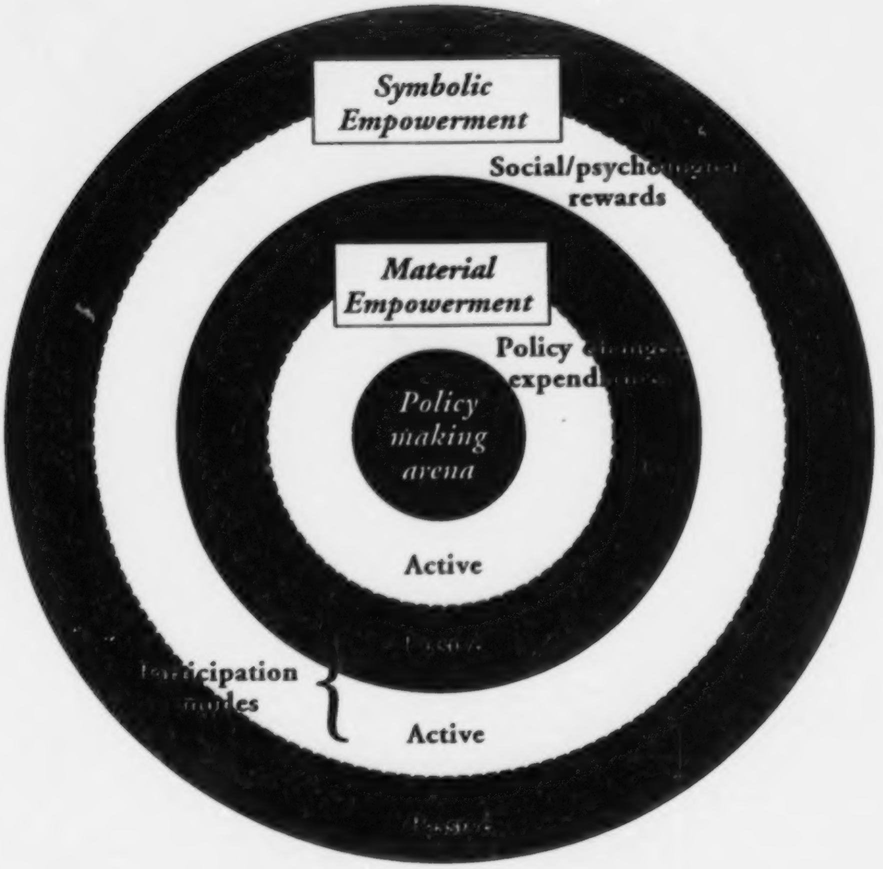
Table 4. Civic Actors

| | Participation Mode | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Empowerment | Active (Direct) | Passive (Indirect) | Inactive |
| Symbolic | Civic-minded public, political expressives/ activists, volunteers | Working masses, middle classes | Chronic know-nothings, under classes |
| Material | Politically influential, economic elites, upper classes | White-collar professionals, intelligentsia | Celebrities, socialites, upper classes |

Table 5. Civic Rewards

| | Participation Mode | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Empowerment | Active (Direct) | Passive (Indirect) | Inactive |
| Symbolic | Social status, proximity to material power, increased efficacy | Become informed, monitor material power, psychological rewards | Political alienation |
| Material | Policy changes, governmental expenditures | Peer recognition, professional status, media attention | Political apathy |

Figure 1. Political Pressure System


Symbolic Empowerment
Social/psychological rewards
Material Empowerment
Policy changes/expenditures
Policy making arena
Active
Passive
Participation modes
Active
Passive

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# From Wall Street to Main Street: An Analysis of Stock Market Recommendations on TV Business News Programs

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## ABSTRACT

Mass media business news coverage grew significantly in the last 20 years, American stock ownership proliferated in the 1990s, and stock analysts' recommendations in 2000 were overwhelmingly positive. Based on these facts, this study analyzed experts' stock recommendations as presented on four highly popular and easily accessible TV business news programs during the last quarter of 2000. Although results showed differences among programs, an overall positive bias existed when programs were viewed as a whole.

# From Wall Street to Main Street: An Analysis of Stock Market Recommendations on TV Business News Programs

Recent statistics show that either directly or indirectly, nearly 50% of the U.S. population owns stock (Samuelson, 1999; Getlin, 2000), and that from 1992 to 1998, families having direct or indirect stock ownership increased from 36.7% to 48.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Stock market commentator Thomas Frank (2000) explained these phenomena as partial outcomes of the investment industry's "...obvious financial interest in encouraging the general public to entrust it with our savings" (p. 93). Browning (2000) described such participation in the bull market of the 1980s and 1990s as a cultural event, commenting that "Buying and selling stocks has become a staple of life, alongside work, family and religion" (p. C1).

Additionally, several observers have noted that Americans are obsessed with business (Simons, 1999) and that despite the growth in business news outlets, the population still clamors for more business-related information (Saporito, 1999). Ironically, Clark, Mannix, and Ackerman (1999) reported that during the longest "bull" market in history, "...the wealthiest 1% of Americans received 86% of the stock market's total gains from 1983-1997" (p. 53). While these authors noted that only 28% of the population owns more than $10,000 worth of stock, thus partially explaining the lack of widespread wealth distribution from stock market earnings, it still is important to evaluate stock market information disseminated through the mass media to those Americans who do invest in the stock market at any level.

Specifically, one vehicle of dissemination that has grown in number and popularity since 1980 has been the TV business news program, with entire cable networks now dedicated to such programming, e.g., CNNfn and Bloomberg Television.[1] Such networks, however, are generally not included in the basic cable-TV packages that serve most Americans. The typical TV viewer, therefore, must be satisfied to obtain stock market information from the daily and weekly TV business programs offered by networks that are included in basic cable-TV packages, such as those found on public broadcasting networks (PBS), the Cable News Network (CNN), and on the Fox News Network (FNN). This research analyzes a sample of those programs to determine what stock recommendations they offer to viewers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Covering Business News

Nearly a quarter of a century ago, Sethi (1977) examined the relationship between business and the American news media, and he found that business leaders were very critical of the media's business coverage. In fact, Sethi grouped the criticisms into three categories: 1) the "economic illiteracy" of most journalists, 2) inadequate coverage, and 3) anti-business bias among newspeople (p. 240). Four years later, Dominick (1981) reported that 60% of network newscasts' business coverage concerned "bad news" about topics such as strikes, environmental threats, product recalls, and illegal financial dealings (p. 185).

Other writers have concentrated on the growth of business news in general. Rathbun (1997), for example, discussed the fact that radio coverage of business news has substantially increased, and Saporito (1999) detailed the explosion of business media in the last 20 years. Focusing primarily on the print media, he documented the growth of investment-oriented news, noting that in 1988 *The Wall Street Journal* added a section titled "Money and Investing," and that new business magazines such as *SmartMoney* and *Worth* (both launched in 1992) were flooding the market. Additionally, Saporito referred to the development of Bloomberg TV and Bloomberg radio, which were natural extensions of the computerized data service that Michael Bloomberg developed to compete with the Dow Jones Company.

Also, Stepp (1999) described changes in business news coverage from 1964 to 1999, noting that in a sample of regional dailies, the percentage of the newshole devoted to business has more than doubled in the last generation. Perhaps more importantly, Simons (1999) pointed out the inroads that Bloomberg News, the relative newcomer, had made in supplying financial news to financial desks around the country, including those at both newspapers and TV stations. He also noted that in September 1999, *The Wall Street Journal* began publishing a Sunday insert for major metropolitan dailies.

## Believing the Analysts

Often, financial news outlets will quote or interview stock analysts, and a variety of research has examined the motivations behind analysts' recommendations and the effects that the dissemination of such recommendations have on stock market activity. The results were nearly uniform. Concerning analysts' motivations, it is clear that a firm's positive stock recommendations are frequently the result of a firm's desire to attract or maintain investment banking business (Womack, 1996; Dreman, 2000; Hill, 2000; Kurtz, 2000; Lauricella, 2000; Barber, Lehavy, McNichols, & Trueman, 2001; Morgan & Stocken, 2001). Grant (2001) described the relationship most bluntly when he wrote, "In all but name, analysts have become investment-banking salesmen" (p. 153).

Regarding the effects of analysts' recommendations, Beneish (1991) found significant relationships between stock price performance and publication of analysts' comments published in *The Wall Street Journal*'s "Heard on the Street" column; Albert and Smaby (1996) found a significant relationship when "superior analysts" were quoted in *The Wall Street Journal*'s "Dartboard" column; and Sant and Zaman (1996) studied the "Inside Wall Street" column in *Business Week* and found a temporary positive relationship between stock price performance and analysts' positive recommendations for stocks followed by fewer than 20 analysts. Additionally, when Chang and Suk (1998) examined the relationship between business news dissemination and stock price performance, they found that news of insider trades, published in *The Wall Street Journal*'s "Insider Trading Spotlight," was significantly related to abnormal stock performance and increases in trading volume. Ultimately, Byron (2001) concluded, "Whether or not the recommendations have much (or even any) intrinsic merit is an interesting question, but for now it is enough to know that they do have the power to move stocks" (p. 86).

Other analyses of analysts' recommendations have revealed provocative conclusions. For example, reflecting on analysts' prowess as investigative researchers in 2000, Shilling (2001) noted, "Despite corporate guidance, analysts were still bagged often" (p. 152). To support his thesis, he identified seven major stock price declines that surprised analysts that year. Pearlstein (2001) reviewed an expanded time frame and found that financial experts "...have not predicted any of the nine recessions since the end of World War II" (p. A1), and Easterwood and Nutt (1999) found that analysts "...both underreact to negative information and overreact to positive information" (p. 1796).

**Evaluating Other Types of Business News**

In addition to quoting stock analysts, financial media outlets interview company presidents and chief operating officers (CEOs), and several authors have speculated that appearances by a company spokesperson can move the price of that company's stock. Kurson (1998) and Galarza (1998), in commenting on the effects of such appearances on the CNBC early morning program *Squawk Box*, referred to a

"*Squawk Box* effect" or "bounce." They meant that a company's stock price will rise on the day the company's president or CEO appears on the program.

On the other hand, other commentators have warned against believing the "news" carried by various financial news outlets. Gardner and Gardner (1996) criticized the print media and the broadcast media for not holding financial pundits responsible, concluding that "For too long this [financial news] industry has relied on hocus-pocus and short attention spans" (p. 56). Diamond (1999) observed, "The booming stock market has created an explosion in the number of outlets for financial analysis and commentary. Not surprisingly, the quality of discussion has not thereby been elevated" (p. A22). Kurtz (2000) was highly critical of the conflicts of interests that he believes occur daily in the business media, commenting that "The media's willingness to play along with this insider game is nothing short of appalling" (p. 304).

While it is clear that in some ways, business news does move markets, at least in some immediate sense, it also is clear that there are additional concerns about the quality of such news. For example, Pethokoukis (1997) suggested that analysts' recommendations may be driven by various strategies, including garnering public attention and appealing to investors' hope regarding a booming market. Both result in investor activity, which, Pethokoukis noted, benefits brokerage firms. Indeed, recent analyses of analysts' stock ratings show a bias against advice to sell stock. Hill (2000), referring to data compiled by stock research company First Call/Thompson Financial, noted that less than 1% of 27,000 analysts' research reports dated July 31, 2000, contained a sell recommendation. Emery (2000), also referring to that data, told readers that only 29 (.3%) of 9,402 stock ratings published by the 10 biggest U.S. brokerage firms were "sells."

This trend is not new, although it has become more acute over the last 15-20 years. Womack (1996) studied data from 1989-1991 and found that new "buy" recommendations occurred seven times more often than did new "sell" recommendations. He also noted that Zacks Investment Research put the ratio of new "buys" to new "sells" at 10:1 during this period (p. 143). Lauricella (2000) quoted a First Call spokesperson as saying that 15-20 years ago, "sell" recommendations made up 5-10% of the total. Vickers and Weiss (2000) reported in April 2000 that "buys" outnumbered "sells" 72:1, but that 10 years previous the ratio was 10:1. As recently as February 15, 2001, Susan Lisovicz noted on CNN's "Moneyline News Hour" that Zacks Investment Research data showed .8% of the stock recommendations it follows were "sells" or "strong sells," with 29% of the recommendations being "strong buys," 39% being "buys," and 31% being "holds"; on February 16, 2001, First Call/Thompson Financial confirmed that only 1.2% of the nearly 28,000 recommendations it was following were "sells" or "strong sells" (personal communication with First Call's Ken Perkins).

## Judging the Meaning and Worth of Recommendations

As corollaries to the distribution of analysts' recommendations, a few authors have pointed out that some recommendations have hidden meanings, and that generally by the time individual investors learn about the recommendations, it is too late. Berenson (2000) noted that institutional investors know that a "neutral" recommendation means "sell," and Dreman (2000) pointed out that analysts use such terms as "accumulate, neutral, maintain, hold, or even long-term buy" to warn against various stocks (p. 386). Economist Robert Frank (2000) said, "Economists disagree about many things, but one belief we share is that investors can almost never make financial headway by trading on the basis of numbers they hear about through the media. By the time such news reaches us, others will have long since acted upon it" (p. 29). Similarly, Byron (2001) explained,"...the highest quality reports have been almost completely unavailable to individuals—at least until after the investment firms that prepared them have shared them with their major institutional clients" (p. 19).

Whether or not business news and analyst recommendations are worthy appears to be debatable. Quinn (2001) said, "As an investor, you should start with one fact: No one — no one — knows what is going to happen to stocks" (p. 1D). Getlin (2000) quoted the editorial director for *Business Week* as saying, "People should admit when they buy or sell [stock] off of media chatter that it's gambling, not investing" (p. A14). And financial guru Peter Lynch (1989) wrote, "Twenty years in this business convinces me that any normal person using the customary three percent of the brain can pick stocks just as well, if not better, than the average Wall Street expert" (p. 13).

Some evidence to support the idea that investment experts may not be the best stock pickers is provided by the TV program *Wall Street Week*, which quantifies both the annual portfolio performance of its 22 rotating panelists and the weekly predictions of 10 financial experts concerning stock market behavior in the succeeding three months. For the year 2000, the portfolio analysis showed that 17 of the 22 portfolios were down (Wall Street Week, 2001a), and that the average portfolio was down 7.72%. Out of a possible 560 predictions about stock market behavior (there were 10 predictions per week for 52 weeks concerning the Dow Jones industrial average and, beginning December 8, there were 10 additional predictions per week concerning the Nasdaq composite average), only 125 (22.3%)[3] were correct (Wall Street Week, 2001b).

Additionally, Jasen (2001) reported that for the third consecutive six-month period, a stock portfolio picked by *Wall Street Journal* staff members flinging darts at the stock tables outpaced a portfolio chosen by a team of investment professionals. He also reported, however, that "The pros are ahead of the darts by a score of 78-50 when results of the 128 contests since 1990 are tallied" (p. C8).

**Examining TV Business News Programs**

Given the proliferation of mass media business news, the overwhelmingly positive bias of analysts' stock recommendations, and the concerns others have raised about the quality of business news, this study examines the financial news provided to viewers through four of the most popular, easily accessible TV business news programs. Specifically, the study analyzes recommendations about specific stocks that investors may trade on a daily basis, about specific stock sectors that contain commonly traded stocks, and about broad markets in general.

The following five hypotheses were tested:

$H_1$: Hosts will make fewer recommendations than experts.

$H_2$: Overall, recommendations will reflect a positive bias.

$H_3$: Recommendations about individual stocks will reflect a positive bias.

$H_4$: Recommendations about individual stock sectors will reflect a positive bias.

$H_5$: Recommendations about broad markets in general will reflect a positive bias.

The first hypothesis flows from the principle that the hosts, following established journalistic practice, generally will avoid inserting their opinions into the news they report or into the interviews they conduct with their expert guests. Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, and 5 are based on the principles that 1) most of the experts selected as guests on TV business news programs have a vested interest in the public continuing to purchase stocks; 2) by their very nature, one underlying goal of such programs is to help investors make money by buying stocks, which requires positive recommendations about which stocks to buy; and 3) previous research shows that experts generally do not advise investors to sell stock.

## METHOD

To analyze specific stock-related recommendations made on TV business news shows, a content analysis of four top-rated programs was conducted.[2] A sample of these programs airing from October 1, 2000, to December 31, 2000, was selected for analysis. This time frame was chosen because it included an entire quarterly cycle in which 1) company earnings were reported (October); 2) company earnings were digested (November); and 3) company profit warnings were announced prior to the next reporting period (December). Within this time period, the sample consisted of every weekly showing of the PBS program *Wall Street Week*, every weekly showing of the Fox News Network's *Bulls & Bears* program, and every weekly showing of the Fox News Network's *Cavuto on Business* program. Additionally, during the same time period, a purposeful random sample of the daily (M-F) CNN program *Moneyline News Hour* was selected; this sample included 10 shows per month (30 shows total), with the 10 shows from each month consisting of two Mondays, two Tuesdays, two Wednesdays, two Thursdays, and two Fridays. *Moneyline News Hour* is an hour-long program, and the other programs run for 30 minutes each.

Prior to the designated time period for analysis, several shows were recorded and viewed to help define and strengthen the coding process. Based on the discovery that many analyst comments were particularly vague and difficult to score, the researchers elected to code each show together, allowing for immediate discussion between the coders when recommendations were hard to discern.

The coders began by rating each stock recommendation as being positive, negative, or neutral. A recommendation was coded as positive when analyst upgrades for earnings estimates or price targets were reported, or when sources commented that they thought a stock price, sector average, or broad market average would increase in value; indicated that they were buying a stock or recommending it to their clients; or indicated in some other way that they liked a particular stock, sector, or market. A recommendation was coded as negative when analyst downgrades for earnings estimates or price targets were reported, or when sources made comments opposite of those scored as positive. An unspecified group of analyst upgrades or downgrades for the same stock was coded as one positive or negative recommendation. A recommendation was coded as neutral when sources either said they were neutral about a given stock, sector, or market, or when they indicated a stock price, sector index, or market index generally was going to remain unchanged for some period of time. Descriptive phrases such as "remaining in a trading range" and "sawtoothing" indicated neutral views.

To qualify as a recommendation, the source had to indicate an opinion clearly and precisely; comments were not counted as recommendations when the source hedged or qualified the recommendation with words such as "could," "if" "maybe," "might," or "perhaps." The source of each recommendation, either a host or an expert, also was noted. Hosts were identified as those who worked for the network. Experts were identified as non-network personnel who provided advice or commentary on individual stocks or broad markets. They included people such as economists, market and investment strategists, financial editors or columnists, portfolio and fund managers, investment analysts and stock research directors, and spokespeople for brokerage firms. All recommendations were further coded for time frame as short term (zero to six months), long term (more than six months), or undetermined.

Each recommendation by a host or an expert also was coded as being related to either a named individual stock, a designated investment sector, or a broad market. Recommendations for mutual funds were included as recommendations for individual stocks because such funds are traded as individual entities. Coders used the 11 stock sectors identified by the Edward Jones glossary of financial terminology, available at Edward Jones Company brokerage firms. These sectors were as follows: basic materials, capital goods, consumer cyclicals, consumer staples, communication services, energy, financial services, health care, technology, transportation, and utilities. Recommendations were coded as broad market if they referred generally to the stock market or specifically to either the bond market, the Dow Jones industrial average, the Nasdaq composite index, the New York stock market, the American stock market, or to broader indexes such as the S & P 500 and the Russell 2000. Foreign markets were excluded in this study.

Stempel (1989) has suggested, "The person doing a content study by himself should, near the end of the work, recode some of the earlier material and compare" (p. 133). Thus after coding all the programs once, the two coders, once again coding together (as if coding was being done by one person), recoded the first 10% of the programs in the sample. Due to the difficulty in rating recommendation time frames and the fact that overall coder reliability increased from .81 to .87 when time frames were excluded, time frames were omitted from the final analysis. Differences between positive and negative recommendation totals, both overall and by program, were analyzed using two-tailed *t*-tests.

## RESULTS

The original sample consisted of 69 shows, but all airings of one *Bulls & Bears* show and one *Cavuto on Business* show were preempted by coverage of court proceedings concerning the 2000 presidential election. Additionally, one *Moneyline News Hour* show was neither viewed nor recorded due to an extended, weather-related power outage, and five half-hour versions of *Moneyline News Hour* shows were substituted for five hour-long shows that were preempted by coverage of election-related court proceedings. Thus 12 *Bulls & Bears* shows, 12 *Cavuto on Business* shows, 13 *Wall Street Week* shows, and 29 *Moneyline News Hour* shows were recorded and coded. The coded content of these 66 shows represented approximately 30 hours of programming, which excluded commercials, network promotions, and station identification time. Occasionally, during November and December, these shows contained significant amounts of election-oriented material not relevant to this study.

### Program Formats

Despite the infiltration of election-oriented content, the format of each program remained fairly consistent. The *Bulls & Bears* format was primarily round-table discussion that included entertaining visual images and playful bantering among two-to-five experts and one host. Virtually all segments of each show included stock, sector, or broad market recommendations. *Cavuto on Business* also used the round-table discussion format, but generally the discussion concerned market activity, economy-related issues, and world financial affairs; the host seldom elicited individual stock recommendations from the three experts and the one network financial editor who made up the panel.

*Wall Street Week*, on the other hand, opened with a brief monologue by the host, who discussed the past week's market activity and reviewed the predictive accuracy of the "elves." Each week, 10 technical analysts (elves) predicted three-month movements of stock market averages. For nine weeks during the sampling period, elves predicted movement of only the Dow Jones industrial average; during the last four weeks of the period, elves also predicted movement of the Nasdaq composite index. A bullish or "plus" vote predicted a market average increase of 5% or more during the succeeding three months. A bearish or "minus" vote predicted a decline of 5% or more, and a neutral vote predicted a movement of within 5%, either way.

Following the host's remarks, the program typically contained a tightly formatted question-and-answer session in which the host questioned three expert panelists; this was followed by another tightly formatted session in which the host and the three panelists questioned a fourth expert. All question-and-answer sessions contained little or no free-ranging interaction among experts. Occasionally, *Wall Street Week* presented special segments involving new products, specific market sectors, or answers to viewer questions.

The format of *Moneyline News Hour* differed significantly from the formats of the other three programs in the study. Instead of relying mainly on panels, this program consisted of segments in which the two hosts and other network personnel individually reviewed the day's market activity; one of the hosts or one other network employee individually interviewed financial experts or company leaders; and one of the hosts presented special segments such as "Tech Watch," "Sector Reports," or "Ahead of the Curve." Executive profiles, special reports on companies, and interviews with CNN's financial editor, Myron Kandel, also occurred occasionally.

## Recommendation Distributions

An overview of the results shows that of 842 recommendations coded, hosts made only eight (.9%), thus supporting Hypothesis 1, that hosts would make fewer recommendations than experts. Six of the eight host recommendations were positive and two were negative. Of the 834 recommendations made by experts, 612 (73.4%) were positive, 181 (21.7%) were negative, and 41 (4.9%) were neutral. Because of the low number of recommendations made by hosts and the low number of neutral recommendations made by experts, these data did not warrant further analysis. As indicated in Table 1, the difference between the numbers of total positive and negative expert recommendations was statistically significant, thus supporting Hypothesis 2, that overall, recommendations will reflect a positive bias.

When expert recommendations were analyzed by individual categories of stocks, sectors, and broad market, the differences between the numbers of positive and negative recommendations remained significant. The data in Table 1 show that experts overall made 317 (73.4) positive stock recommendations and 115 (26.6%) negative stock recommendations, 74 (70.5%) positive sector recommendations and 31 (29.5%) negative sector recommendations, and 221 (86.3%) positive market recommendations versus 35 (13.7%) negative market recommendations.

Table 1 also contains a program-by-program analysis of stock, sector, broad market, and overall total recommendations, and it is evident from these data that when experts' positive and negative recommendations are analyzed by category and by overall totals, there is noticeable program-by-program variation. For example, the numbers of positive and negative recommendations made on the *Cavuto on Business* program were not significantly different in any individual category or overall, while the differences generated by the *Wall Street Week* program were statistically significant in every category, including overall totals. Differences generated by the *Moneyline News Hour* program were statistically significant only when individual sectors were considered, and differences generated by *Bulls & Bears* program experts were statistically significant only when individual stocks and overall totals were considered.

Of the total recommendations, 31 were analysts' stock downgrades reported by hosts, rather than articulated by experts appearing on a specific program. Six recommendations concerned the bond market, and only three related to mutual funds. There were no mentions of stock upgrades on any of the shows that were coded. Addi-

Table 1

*Positive and Negative Expert Recommendations per Category, by Program*

| | *Program* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Category | [a]Cavuto on Business (n=12) | [b]Moneyline News Hour (n=29) | [c]Bulls & Bears (n=12) | [d]Wall Street Week (n=13) | [e]Grand Totals (n=66) |
| Stocks | | | | | |
| Positive | 6 | 59 | 88 | 164 | 317 |
| Negative | 6 | 50 | 51 | 8 | 115 |
| *t* | NS | NS | 2.210* | 4.305*** | 3.474*** |
| Sectors | | | | | |
| Positive | 1 | 24 | 22 | 27 | 74 |
| Negative | 0 | 10 | 11 | 10 | 31 |
| *t* | NS | 2.294* | NS | 3.157** | 3.428*** |
| Broad Market | | | | | |
| Positive | 15 | 25 | 19 | 162 | 221 |
| Negative | 5 | 8 | 20 | 2 | 35 |
| *t* | NS | NS | NS | 8.530*** | 4.235*** |
| Overall Totals | | | | | |
| Positive | 22 | 108 | 129 | 353 | 612 |
| Negative | 11 | 68 | 82 | 20 | 181 |
| *t* | NS | NS | 2.489* | 6.473*** | 4.436*** |

Notes: *df*: a=11, b=28, c=11, d=12, e=65
*p* values: * <.05, ** <.01, *** <.001

tionally, in the approximately 30 hours of programming that were coded, experts actually used the word "sell" four times and the word "avoid" twice, to indicate negative recommendations. Other indications of negative recommendations included the use of phrases such as "Dot-Gone," "Dot-Bomb," and "Yahoo equals Boo-Hoo," to refer to Internet companies, and the use of phrases such as "tech wreck," to refer to sector problems.

## Commentary Trends

Sometimes, comments from experts could not be coded, even though there may have been a thread of positive or negative meaning within the comment. For example, early in the December 9 *Bulls & Bears* show, an expert said, "Microsoft is an interesting play." Later in the show, referring to the fact that he owned no Microsoft stock at the moment, he said, "At the close of business Monday, I might not be able to say that." On the December 19 *Moneyline News Hour* show, reporter John Metaxas, reporting from the Nasdaq market site, said, "Amazon hit a 52-week low, down almost 10% on the day after S.G. Cowan reiterated a 'buy' rating. But then the analyst said it would be prudent to avoid the stock; the fact that they (sic) [Amazon.com] are discounting and offering free shipping this season makes the results a little bit cloudy."

Other examples of confusing information observed in the programming included a *Moneyline News Hour* host on November 24 characterizing an analyst's neutral rating as really being a negative rating, and an expert telling host Louis Rukeyser on the December 22 *Wall Street Week* show, "We don't look at sectors; we look at individual stocks. The tech sector is looking good to us." It also should be noted that during some rapid-fire exchanges among panelists and hosts, it sometimes was difficult to determine how many stocks an expert was talking about when answering a question from the host.

On the other hand, most of the recommendations were stated clearly. In addition to the "sell" and "avoid" comments noted above, some experts were even vehement about their recommendations. One expert on the December 9 *Bulls & Bears* show, in referring to the energy sector, said, "Get rid of the whole sector." Such openly direct statements about sectors and individual stocks were common on this program, as was a high energy level. On the other three programs, experts generally seemed to follow unwritten rules of etiquette in giving their recommendations, calmly responding in measured tones to queries from the hosts.

Finally, during the sampling period, hosts and experts also made comments about analysts and their market-forecasting abilities. One guest on the December 23 *Bulls & Bears* show quoted well-known Merrill Lynch analyst Henry Blodgett as saying, "Analysts are always late." On the December 29 *Wall Street Week* show, the host reported that the year 2000 had been the worst overall year for the elves since they were created.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Consistent with established journalistic standards, hosts observed in this study did, for the most part, refrain from injecting their opinions into discussions, interviews, and the news they reported. Thus analysis focused on expert recommendations. Despite the fact that during the sampling period the Dow Jones industrial average rose a mere 136 points (1.3%), the Nasdaq composite index fell a significant 1201 points (32.7%), and the S&P 500 index fell a moderate 116 points (8.1%), results in this study supported previous findings that investment analysts are generally positive in their recommendations. Additionally, the small number of "sells" mentioned in the sample supports earlier findings that analysts are wary of issuing "sell" recommendations. Nonetheless, when compared with the far more positive recommendations compiled by stock research companies such as Zacks Investment Research and First Call/Thompson Financial, three of the four programs presented a strikingly more balanced look at the markets.

Of the four programs analyzed, *Wall Street Week* offered the largest number of recommendations and was the most positive in its presentation of stock market advice. Presumably, this combination constituted the driving force behind the highly significant differences between total positive and negative recommendations involving stocks, sectors, and broad markets. This was true because panelists were positive and because the questions posed to some guests encouraged them to promote the sectors in which they were involved. Conversely, *Cavuto on Business* offered the smallest number of recommendations of any kind because this program primarily involved discussion of the market generally and the economy on the whole, with relatively little attention being paid to individual stocks.

On a percentage basis, *Bulls & Bears* and *Moneyline News Hour* had the least difference between the overall numbers of positive and negative recommendations. An explanation for this finding might lie in the format of these programs. As implied by its name, *Bulls & Bears* relies upon two contrasting outlooks on the market, one positive (bulls) and one negative (bears). To support the program's theme, these outlooks should be relatively well-balanced. The more traditional "newscast" format of *Moneyline News Hour* necessitates an objective approach to reporting and therefore must cover both the positive and negative viewpoints of market analysts. If viewers watch all four programs, they clearly will receive an overall positive view of the equities markets; however, if viewers are selective in their viewing, they can draw a variety of conclusions about stocks, depending on which program or programs they watch.

As stated earlier, one goal of TV business news programs is to help viewers make money. This is done through inviting guests, supposedly knowledgeable about investing in the stock market, to make recommendations about which stocks to buy. To encourage viewers to buy stocks, experts also must present a favorable outlook on the market, and they did this not only through direct comments, but by evading questions about selling or avoiding stocks. Instead of answering such questions, many guests would equivocate and then proceed to discuss what they would buy. Possible motivations for this evasiveness and for experts to make consistently positive recommendations about stocks, sectors, or the broad markets might include the profits generated by 1) attracting potential investors, 2) maintaining good investment banking relations, or 3) collecting transaction costs associated with high levels of stock turnover and portfolio rebalancing.

Overall, investors who obtain their business news from the mass medium of television must be wary of the information provided. The recommendations made by experts on TV business news programs are, for the most part, colored with a positive bias, and depending on which programs are viewed, the pictures painted for the future of stocks, sectors, and broad markets can be much rosier than reality dictates.

As a postscript to data available prior to this study, it should be noted that several sources have indicated significant drops in TV business news program ratings since the bull market began declining in mid-2000. For example, an article in the *Wall Street Journal* noted year-over-year (January 2000 to January 2001) ratings drops of 8-20% and attributed them to a slowing economy (Beatty, 2001). "When it comes to dwindling viewership," she wrote, "part of the explanation is that it's simply more fun to win than to lose" (p. B1). A similar explanation was offered by a commentator on National Public Radio's *On the Media* show. He said, "For years, the *raison d'etre* of cable financial news was to 'tune in and profit by what you'd learn.' The proposition 'stay tuned and cut your losses' doesn't have quite the same ring" (Capello, 2001).

As some viewers may rely upon TV business news programs not analyzed in this study or upon local and national newscasts, future research might extend to additional business programs and to traditional news programs. Attention also might be paid to the accuracy of observed predictions by checking them at arbitrarily determined points. Finally, further analysis of individual analysts' backgrounds and prediction track records might be informative.

## NOTES

[1] For a timeline showing debut dates for TV business news programs and networks, see Henriques, D.B. (November/December 2000). Business Reporting: Behind the Curve. *Columbia Journalism Review*, *39*, 18-21.

[2] According to the *Wall Street Week* producer, the program is watched by four-to-five million viewers and is available to 99.6 percent of TV households. According to network advertising rate cards obtained for this research (concerning viewership numbers) and the 2000 edition of *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook* (concerning availablity to TV households), a) *Moneyline* is watched by 830,000 viewers in either the one-hour format or the half-hour format, on either CNN or CNNfn, and is available to just under 80 million TV households; b) *Cavuto on Business* is watched by 398,000 viewers during three showings and is available to 54 million TV households; and c) *Bulls & Bears* is watched by 370,000 viewers during three showings and is available to 54 million TV households. By way of comparison, as of January 2001, the estimated maximum number of average daytime viewers of CNBC and CNNfn, two TV networks devoted to financial news, was 303,000 (down from 339,000 in January 2000) and 50,000, respectively. CNBC is available to approximately 72 million households and CNNfn is available to an estimated 13.3 million households. Bloomberg Television is available full time to 11 million subscribers and part time (generally early morning hours) to 77 million subscribers.

[3] This total includes eight correct predictions by an "elf" who was replaced in 2000.

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# Media and Democracy: News Media's Political Alienation Effect in Both Election and Non-Election Settings

by

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# Media and Democracy: News Media's Political Alienation Effect in Both Election and Non-Election Settings

## Abstract

Many studies about news media's alienation effects are limited to an election framework. One may wonder whether the news media politically alienate the general public during non-election times. Also, most political alienation studies rely on a relatively small local sample. In order to go beyond the limited paradigm of elections, as well as to provide a more representative sample, this study analyzes both a national political survey and a national consumer research data set. Contrary to what many other studies have suggested, our findings suggest that the news media do not lead to political alienation in either settings.

# Media and Democracy: News Media's Political Alienation Effect in Both Election and Non-Election Settings

The majority of studies on media's effect on political participation rely on data gathered in an election framework, especially presidential races. However, politics goes on during both elections and non-election times. It is reasonable to question whether the findings would differ in the latter.

There are a number of studies about how the news media may have influenced people's attitudes toward particular social or political events (such as a foreign war) or politicians (like presidents' approval ratings). However, somewhat less research investigates media's influence on political attitudes in general, which is an important topic because elections are not the only time citizens should pay attention to politics.

With information from a non-political, consumer research data set gathered in a non-election year (1995), the present study investigates the relationship between two critical components in political communication research (political efficacy/alienation, and the use of news media) in a non-political setting, which is the focus.

The main purpose of the present study is to go beyond elections, when voters naturally would pay more attention to political news because campaign news dominates the media agenda, considering the effect of agenda-setting (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Elections are also a time when there are more negative political messages such as attack ads that may indeed alienate voters (Jamieson, 1992). This study examines whether the news media may have influenced political attitudes and behaviors when an election is not in process. Indirectly, the present study tests whether the media have a stronger alienation effect during election campaigns due to "attack politics."

Another interesting phenomenon among studies measuring the news media's alienation effect is that many of them are based on local (usually one state) survey samples. It is reasonable to wonder whether the results would vary if a national sample were employed, considering the vast difference in political climate in various states.

Therefore, in addition to the focus of the present study (measuring media's alienation effect in a non-election setting), a national survey related to presidential campaign is analyzed for two purposes. The first is to use the election-related data set as the comparison baseline for the primary focus (alienation during a non-election time). The second purpose is to examine whether national data (versus local) would provide a different answer regarding media's alienation effect during an election.

It is important to point out that this paper does not make a direct comparison between the two data sets. Making comparisons using two separate surveys with different question wordings conducted in two different years is not a desirable approach. Although there is an element of comparison in this study nevertheless, readers should see such comparison in the present study in a different light.

## Theoretical Framework

### Political alienation and cynicism

The public's participation in politics, such as voting in elections, has been considered an essential part of a democracy (DeLuca, 1995). This is why many researchers worry about the increasing number of "independents" (who are less likely to vote than partisans) and low turnout rates among all voters (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Asher, 1992; Gant & Luttbeg, 1991; Keith et. al, 1992).

Obstacles such as the difficulties with voter registration have contributed to low participation in U.S. politics. However, political alienation remains a key factor in non-voting (Chen, 1992; Southwell 1985). The media, unfortunately, may have contributed to such alienation.

According to Chen (1992) and Southwell (1985), political alienation has these dimensions: 1) cynicism or distrust (individuals' negative perception of the honesty and capabilities of politicians and political institutions); 2) powerlessness (an individual feels he or she cannot influence the political process); 3) meaninglessness (political parties do not offer meaningful choices among candidates and issues; and the outcomes are therefore unpredictable); and 4) apathy or indifference (individuals simply are not interested in politics regardless of their political efficacy). To participate in politics or not, they argue, does not depend on the numbers of obstacles in the system, but whether these individuals feel that they have a reason to get involved. Mutz (1987) proposed a three-dimensional system regarding political alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness, which is, however, more related to political knowledge acquisition than participation.

Among the dimensions above, three are often studied in political communication research: cynicism, involvement, and efficacy.

Cynicism, defined as distrusting politicians and/or the entire political system or institutions, may lead to low voter turnout and less attention to public affairs news (Crotty & Jacobson, 1980; Bandura, 1986; Entman, 1989; Jamieson, 1992; Perloff & Kinsey, 1992; Austin & Pinkleton, 1995, 1997, 2000; Pinkleton & Austin, 1997).

Two other popular concepts are political confidence or efficacy (individuals' feeling that they are qualified to participate and they can make a difference in politics) and involvement (emotional or behavioral participation, such as having an interest and voting) (Zaichkowsky, 1985, 1986; Faber, Tims & Schmitt, 1993; Kanihan & Chaffee, 1996; Austin & Pinkleton, 1997; Pinkleton & Austin, 1997). The present study investigates the relationships between media usage and such variables as interest, cynicism, efficacy and voting.

### Media's role in political alienation

There is a consensus that the news media play an important role in U.S. politics in general and in elections in particular (Drew & Weaver, 1998; Graber, 1994; Joslyn, 1984;

Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995). For example, the news media are a major source of political information that allows citizens to make informed decisions (McLeod & McDonald, 1985; Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992). As Patterson put it, nowadays what the voters learn about political campaigns "is not the real campaign but the media's version of it" (1980: 9).

However, mass media have been criticized for adding to the negativity of the political environment (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; Johnson, Hays, & Hays, 1998; Patterson, 1994). Particularly, Fallows (1996) and Sabato (1993) have pointed out that media coverage of politics has been largely negative, which has led to the already high level of citizens' -- especially the younger generation's-- cynicism and negativity (Bennett, 1997). Weaver (1994) also argued that when the campaign agenda is perceived by voters as being mostly controlled by the media and politicians, where the public has little say, this would increase alienation and cynicism.

Only a handful of studies argue that the news media do not make citizens cynical or alienated. For example, Pinkleton and Austin (1997) suggest that media use is positively linked with efficacy and involvement, and positively but indirectly linked to voting. Also, unlike Fallows' (1996) and Sabato's (1993) assessment of media's negative impact on cynicism and alienation (in general rather than during elections in particular), Pinkleton & Austin (1997) argue that information search and media use during an election would predict a lower level of cynicism. Austin & Pinkleton (1999) also suggest that skepticism toward the news would not affect the general public's political involvement. In addition, Leshner & Mckean (1997) state that news media usage only contributes to political knowledge rather than cynicism toward politicians. Similarly, studies by Miller & Reese (1982) and McLeod & McDonold (1985) did not find any association between media usage and lack of political efficacy or participation.

As mentioned above, most studies of this nature focus on media's roles in elections, and many focus on the impact of negative advertising (e.g., Garramone, 1984;

Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 1989; Jamieson, 1992; Ansolabehere & Iyengar, 1995; Kaid & Holtz-Bacha, 1995; Lemert, Wanta & Lee, 1999; Schenck-Hamlin, Procter & Rumsey, 2000; Wanta, Lemert & Lee, 1998). A majority of them state that the news media contribute to citizens' political cynicism and distrust in government, and almost all of them use an election/campaign framework.

There are a few other excellent studies about media's impact on politics, but their foci are different. They investigate media's role in shaping citizens' perception of political groups and institutions based on analyses of media content (e.g., Gitlin, 1980; Hallin, 1994; Page, 1996).

Fallows' (1996) and Sabato's (1993) are among the few empirical studies that go beyond the election paradigm to examine media's role in people's political alienation. However, like a few other studies mentioned above, theirs focus is on the media (content) but not the audience (behavior). Therefore, a study concerning the audience within a non-election framework is in order.

It should be pointed out that most studies mentioned above are based on samples of a few hundreds of survey respondents from a single state, such as Indiana (e.g., Drew & Weaver, 1998), Oregon (e.g., Lemert, Wanta & Lee, 1999), Missouri (e.g., Leshner & Mckean, 1997), Wisconsin (e.g., McLeod & McDonald, 1985), and Washington (e.g., Austin & Pinkleton, 1999). One may wonder whether a national sample would produce different results, which is another contribution the present study seeks to make.

## Research Questions

The following research questions are generated based on the discussions above:

**Q1**: Does political interest encourage media use?

**Q2**: Does confidence (efficacy) contribute to media use?

**Q3**: Does media usage contribute to cynicism?

**Q4**: Does news media usage discourage interest in politics?

**Q5**: Does news media usage discourage participation (voting)?

All the above questions were tested with both the consumer and political data sets. The first goal of this study is to investigate whether the news media are related to political interest, cynicism and alienation in a non-election setting. The second goal is to measure, with a national survey, whether the news media have an alienation effect during an election.

Although putting both sets of results side by side may naturally lead one to make comparisons, it should be kept in mind that a direct comparison may be problematic because both data sets have different questions wordings and were collected in different years.

## Method

The first data set utilized in this study is a large consumer research survey, *Life Style*, conducted by a key branch of a major international advertising agency (DDB Needham in Chicago) in 1995. Since 1975, this agency annually selects a national quota (matching the U.S. population on age, income, and area of residence) sample of 4,000 for its mail panel survey, with a consistent response rate of around 80% (Cafferata, Horn & Wells, 1997). The 1995 data have an N slightly more than 3,600.

This *Life Style* survey contains about 500 questions concerning respondents' beliefs, values, habits, activities, and media and product usage.

Two variables in the survey correspond with political involvement ("I am interested in politics") and political cynicism ("An honest man cannot get elected to high office"). Two variables on media attitude and usage are "You really can't trust the news media to cover events and issues fairly" and "I need to get the news (world, national, sports, etc.) everyday."

There are no particular variables concerning political efficacy. A substituted scale of confidence in general was constructed based on these three statements: 1) "I have more self-confidence than most of my friends"; 2) My friends and neighbors often come to me for advice about products and brands"; and 3) "I am influential in my neighborhood." The N of this scale is 3,568, and Cronbach's alpha is .5241.[1]

Other independent variables include: age, income, education, sex (dummy variable of being women), and a scale of liberal-conservative ideology.

Due to the limitation of a consumer data, the *Life Style* does not have questions about voting. The only proxy available is whether the respondent is a registered voter, which was used as the dependent variable in some of our regression analyses.

The second data set is the 1996 National Election Study (NES), one of the most utilized panel and in-person survey studies in political science with an N of about 1,600 (Asher, 1992; Flanigan & Zingale, 1991). The 1996 NES was conducted right before and after the November 1996 election. Because of its nature, the NES is a more precise measure of political efficacy, alienation, and voting.

News usage was constructed from two questions about how much attention respondents paid to news about the presidential and congressional campaigns ($r = .6045$, $p. < .01$, $N = 1,527$). The scale of political efficacy was constructed based on three statements: "Public officials don't care much about what people like me think." "People like me don't have any say about what the government does." and "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on." The factor loadings of these three items are .6354, .7634 and .7434, respectively. The Cronbach's alpha is .6345 ($N = 1,524$).

A factor analysis was performed among 12 variables related to cynicism. The final scale of cynicism was constructed based on 9 variables, such as: "How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?" "Do you think people in government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes?" "Do you think quite a few people running the government are crooked?" and "How much do you feel that having elections makes the government pay attention to what the people think?" The Cronbach's alpha of this scale is .7353 (N = 1,478).

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[1] Although the question about giving advice on products and services seems awkward in this scale, deleting it would lower the overall alpha.

OLS multiple regression analyses were performed using both data sets. The dependent variables of those four regression models were: news media usage, political cynicism, political interest, and political participation (for the consumer data set: whether the respondent is a registered voter; for the political data set: whether a respondent has voted or is intended to vote in the 1996 election). The main independent variable (which was entered last while running regression) for all models was usage of the news media (except for the first model where news media usage is the dependent variable). Controlling variables include age, income, education, sex (being women), political ideology, political efficacy, and distrust of the news media.

## Findings

For both election and non-election times, we have the same answers to the following questions.

**Q1**: Yes, political interest encourages media use.

**Q2**: Yes, efficacy contributes to media use.

**Q3**: No, the relationship between media use and cynicism is not statistically significant.

**Q4**: No, media usage does not appear to discourage interest in politics.

**Q5**: No, media usage does not discourage participation (voting).

## Non-Election-Time Models

The first model in **Table 1** shows that only political interest (beta = .2510, p. < .01), age (beta = .2233, p. < .01), efficacy (beta = .0991, p. < .01) and education (beta = .0403, p. < .05) are predictors of news media usage. Not surprisingly, people who are interested in politics, older, better educated and have self-confidence are more likely to use the news media. Therefore, both **Q1** and **Q2** are answered positively, and political interest has a stronger impact on news media usage than efficacy.

The second model in **Table 1** suggests that only education (beta = -.1003, p. <.01), being a woman (beta = -.0584, p. <.01), and interest in politics (beta = -.1155, p. <.01) negatively predict cynicism, while distrust in the news media (beta = .2269, p. <.01) contributes to cynicism. In other words, men who are less educated, less interested in politics, and do not trust the media are more likely to be political cynical. Again, media usage is not a statistically significant predictor of political cynicism.

The third model in **Table 1** reveals that the predictors of higher political interest include: more news media usage (beta = .2413, p. < 01), more education (beta = .1801, p. < 01), higher level of efficacy (beta = .1369, p. < .01), not being a man (beta = -.1297, p. < .01), being older (beta = .1108, p. < .01), being less politically cynical (beta = -.1005, p. < .01), but do not trust the news media to report news fairly (beta = .0409, p. < .05). The relationship between political interest and media usage is positive and statistically significant. This means that the news media do not diminish respondents' political interest.

In terms of actual participation, the fourth regression model in **Table 1** (non-election time) suggests that media usage does not have a statistically significant relationship with being a registered voter. The best predictors for being a registered voter include: being older (beta = .2051, p. < .01), having a higher interest in politics (beta = .1693, p. < .01), having a higher income (beta = .1110, p. < .01), being better educated (beta = .0913, p. < .01), being a woman (beta = .0681, p. < .01), having a higher level of efficacy ( beta = .0394, p. < .05), and being more conservative (beta = -.0333, p. < .05). Media usage has no influence on whether a respondent is a registered voter or not.

To sum up, according to the regression models in **Table 1**, the news media do not contribute to political cynicism, lack of political interest, or lack of political participation.

## Election-Time Models

Model 5 in **Table 2** shows that political interest (beta = .5152, p. < .01), age (beta = .1948, p. < .01), political efficacy (beta = .1122, p. <.01) and trust in the news media (beta = -.0876, p. <.01) are significant predictors of news media use. Again, similar to Model 1, political interest has a stronger impact than efficacy on the dependent variable (news media usage). A comparison of the beta's in both models suggests that political interest and efficacy may have a stronger effect on media usage during elections. However, making such comparison requires caution due to the difference between both data sets.

Model 6 in **Table 2** reveals that age (beta = -.1234, p. <.01) education (beta = -.0908, p. < .01), and efficacy (-.4637, p. <.01) all are negative predictors of cynicism, while distrust in media (beta = .2054, p. <.01) is a positive one. In other words, respondents with lower political efficacy, more distrust in the media, a younger age, and less education are more likely to be political cynical. In this model, the relationship between cynicism and political interest or media use are not statistically significant. In other words, a higher usage of the news media does not make people cynical.

While the dependent variable is political interest (Model 7), the use of media in fact is a positive predictor (beta = .5515, p. <.01), followed by political efficacy (beta = .0882, p. < .05). A higher level of news media use does not damage political interest.

Finally, an examination of Model 8 indicates that the use of news media is the stronger predictor of voting (beta = .1783, p. <.01), followed by political interest (beta = .1468, p. < .01), lack of cynicism (beta = -.1193, p. < 01), having a higher income (beta =

.1089, p. < 01), being a woman (beta = .0999, p. < 01), and having a liberal ideology (beta = -.0845, p. < .05). These results suggest that the news media do not discourage citizens from political participation

An informal comparison between both tables suggests that the news media may have a strong impact on both political interest and participation during an election. In both election and non-election settings the usage of news media does not contribute to political cynicism. Also, in both settings, political interest is the best predictor of news usage, although the effect is stronger during an election. However, again, because of the lack of parallel measures, such a comparison between two data sets should be taken cautiously.

## Conclusion and Discussion

The present study contradicts what many political communication studies have suggested about media and political alienation (cynicism, interest, and voting). In sum, the use of news media is not related to cynicism, non-voting, or loss of interest in both election and non-election times. (Please note that we have to be cautious about assuming causal relationships although regression is about making prediction.)

In fact, as logic would predict, media use is positively associated with political interest. In other words, the more you rely on the news media, the more politically interested you are. Conversely, the more interest one has, the more one will use the media. Similarly, media usage is positively related to political efficacy (one's confidence in understanding of and making a difference in politics).

One interesting finding (comparisons of beta's) is that media may have a stronger effect on certain variables (such as political interest and participation) during an election than non-election times. This supports one of the assumptions of this study: media may have different effects during an election. However, this contradicts the expectation that such effect would be negative because of attack ads and other negative information in the media. In other words, the news media do not have a stronger alienation effect during an election than in a non-election setting. In fact, as suggested by our findings, the news media do not have an alienation effect in either election or non-election times.

The present author argues that the present study makes the following contributions to the knowledge of political communication.

First, many studies of this nature examine the news media's alienation effect during an election. Elections do not take place everyday; therefore, it is critical to investigate political alienation in general (not limited to elections). In other words, it is essential to study how people deal with politics when they are not in an election mode. This study fills such a gap in current literature. It can be argued that when people are asked a set of election-oriented questions, the effects of news media on political participation may be artificially boosted. Therefore, measuring media's alienation effect during a non-election time is important.

Second, a number of political communication studies survey a relatively small and usually local sample population. In comparison, the present paper employs large national samples collected during both an election and non-election setting. Therefore, the present study's findings are more generalizable.

Third, when we study political alienation and news media usage with large national samples that focus on the audience, the results are different from a few studies that mainly rely on content analysis or smaller audience samples. The news media, as shown by the present study and a few others, cannot be held responsible for what they have been accused of—alienation of citizens from politics.

Some caution, however, should be used for interpreting our findings concerning non-election times. The strength of our data is also its weakness. For example, due to the limitation of using consumer research data in a political study, voting history or intention could not be measured with the *Life Style* survey. A less desirable variable (whether a respondent is a registered voter or not) was a proxy for political participation (while the NES data directly measure voting). Additionally, in the same data set the use of news media includes sports news, which could cause problems because sports fans may not pay as much attention to political news. Also, whether this question "I need to get the news everyday" directly measures news usage is debatable. Furthermore, self-confidence in general may not be the same as political efficacy. Because of the problems mentioned above, we can expect weaker statistical results.

Another problem with the present study is that both data sets were not gathered at the same time, and question wordings are very different. Although the purpose of this study does not include making direct comparison of media effects during an election and non-election setting, such comparison is still made in the present study to a certain extent. Future research should make a direct comparison to address the issues of validity and reliability.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, the findings of the present study have added more knowledge to the role of media in politics. Especially, it suggests the importance of moving research of media effects in politics beyond elections.

Future studies can follow this "non-election versus election" approach and conduct two separate surveys with identical questions at different times in the same year. They can investigate how citizens use media in daily politics by adding appropriate questions. In addition, they can further differentiate among types of news media (such as newspapers versus television and talk radio), as well as taking more precise measurement of frequency of media usage. Various types of media may have different impacts on political alienation (McLeod & McDonald, 1985; Miller & Reese, 1982). The difference between news exposure, reliance, and actual usage should be precisely measured as well (Miller & Reese, 1982; O'Keefe, 1980).

**Table 1**
**Non-election-time Regression Models**

| Models | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| d.v.-> | news usage | cynicism | interest | voter |
| i.v. | | | | |
| age | .2233** | -.0021 | .1108** | .2051** |
| income | .0291 | -.0268 | .0204 | .1110** |
| education | .0403* | -.1003** | .1801** | .0913** |
| woman | -.0207 | -.0584** | -.1297** | .0681** |
| ideology | .0270 | .0014 | .0054 | -.0333* |
| interest | .2510** | -.1155** | | .1693** |
| efficacy | .0991** | .0022 | .1369** | .0394* |
| news use | | .0105 | .2413** | .0011 |
| news distrust | -.0799 | .2269** | .0409* | .0265 |
| cynicism | | | -.1005** | .0008 |
| R-square | .1683 | .0841 | .2028 | .1269 |

*: p. < .05
** p. < .01

i.v.: independent variables
d.v.: dependent variables

## Table 2
## Election-time Regression Models

| Models | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| d.v.-> | news usage | cynicism | interest | voted |
| i.v. | | | | |
| age | .1948** | -.1234** | .0331 | .0769 |
| income | .0080 | .0259 | -.0407 | .1089** |
| education | -.0051 | -.0908** | .0396 | .0419 |
| woman | -.0048 | .0273 | -.0509 | .0999** |
| ideology | -.0443 | -.0386 | -.0034 | -.0845* |
| interest | .5152** | .0191 | | .1468** |
| efficacy | .1122** | -.4637** | .0882* | -.0204 |
| news use | | -.0529 | .5515** | .1783** |
| news distrust | -.0876** | .2054** | .0607 | .0268 |
| cynicism | | | .0190 | -.1193** |
| R-square | .3858 | .3412 | .3457 | .1575 |

*: p. < .05
** p. < .01

i.v.: independent variables
d.v.: dependent variables

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MC+S

Running head: RACE, JUVENILES, AND LAWBREAKING ON TV NEWS

# Misrepresentation of the Race of Juvenile Criminals on Local Television News

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## Abstract

A content analysis of a random sample of local television news programming in Los Angeles and Orange counties was conducted to assess representations of Black, Latino and White juvenile law-breakers. "Intergroup" comparisons of perpetrators (Black and Latino vs. White) revealed that Black and Latino juveniles are significantly more likely than White juveniles to be portrayed as law-breakers on television news. "Inter-reality" comparisons of law breakers (television news vs. crime reports from the California Department of Justice) revealed that Black juveniles are overrepresented as lawbreakers, while Latino juveniles are underrepresented as law-breakers on television news compared to their respective crime rates obtained from the California Department of Justice for Los Angeles and Orange counties. White juveniles were neither over- nor underrepresented as perpetrators. These findings mirror other recent content studies of adults. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Recently there have been a number of concerns voiced by media critics, parents, and politicians regarding juvenile crime (Dohrn, 1997). High profile school shootings have fueled some of this concern (Gold & Ellingwood, 2001). For example, a school shooting in California prompted the San Diego County District Attorneys office to indicate that the alleged juvenile shooter would automatically be tried as an adult under Proposition 21, a state-wide initiative approved by voters that makes it easier for teenagers to be prosecuted as grown-ups (Gold & Ellingwood, 2001).

Some have claimed that media coverage of school shootings has contributed to the popularity of "get-tough" laws which make it easier to prosecute youth offenders as adults (Doi, 1998; Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998). They argue that these media portrayals typically feature poor African American and Latino youths as "super-predators" (Doi, 1998; Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998). Others have observed that many of the perpetrators featured in high profile school shootings are often portrayed as "troubled" young White males from "good" neighborhoods (Gold & Ellingwood, 2001).

The current study is designed to determine whether White "troubled youth" or Black and Latino "super-predators" are more common on local television news. A content analysis of a random sample of local television news programming drawn over two years in Los Angeles and Orange counties was conducted to assess representations of juvenile law-breakers. This study employs two indices (i.e. intergroup and inter-reality comparisons) used in prior investigations of adult portrayals of race and crime on television news. We describe these indices below after we discuss the value of undertaking this study.

## Black "Super-Predators" vs. White "Troubled" Kids

The juvenile justice system appears to be undergoing a major overhaul away from attempts to reform youth offenders and towards harsher punishment of juvenile delinquents (Bernard, 1999; Snyder, 1999). By 1998, 43 states had adopted laws that made it easier for youths to be tried as adults (Dohrn, 1997). By 2000, all 50 states had a version of such laws (Lewin, 2000). Some critics claim that these changes are being driven by a fear of the juvenile "super-predator" (Dohrn, 1997; Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998). The notion of the super-predator was advanced by John DiIulio who claimed that "moral poverty" has created juvenile criminals who are remorseless, cold-hearted, amoral, poor and Black (Montgomery, 1996). John DiIulio received extensive attention from media and government organizations for his perspective on youth crime (Squires & Ettema, 1997).

### The response to the Black super-predator.

The "get-tough" policy response to the super-predator may be particularly damaging to juvenile perpetrators of color. Youth of color are already overrepresented at every stage of the justice process, from arrests to incarceration, and this overrepresentation cannot be explained by the criminal behavior of these youngsters (Lewin, 2000). A move towards harsher punitive responses fueled by distorted media images of juveniles of color would only increase the number of Black and Latino juveniles represented in the justice system. This issue is important because coverage of youth crime that features African Americans and Latinos as "super-predators" may inspire harsher punitive measures within the juvenile justice system (Dohrn, 1997; Douglas, 1993; Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998). Prior research has shown that Whites in particular are more likely to endorse punitive measures when they are exposed to the super-predator depiction (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998). Given the biases of the juvenile justice system, changes in youth offender laws that emphasize punitive measures may disproportionately hurt juvenile defendants of color (Lewin, 2000). Understanding whether juvenile violence is dominated by people of color is a first step in determining whether the news may be contributing to changes in juvenile law.

Troubled White school shooters. Juvenile delinquency has also become associated with school shootings (Gold & Ellingwood, 2001). These school shootings typically feature White male perpetrators who have been taunted by school mates (Gold & Ellingwood, 2001). These white juvenile criminals are often perceived by adults as more prone to violence than white young perpetrators of prior generations (Onstad, 1997; Ziv, 1996). In addition, although school shootings are not necessarily common occurrences, they are usually marked by sustained media coverage and interest which may dominate discussions of juvenile justice among the citizenry (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; Gold & Ellingwood, 2001).

In summary, depictions of juvenile crime may feature either White school shooters or poor juvenile delinquents of color. In order to determine which portrayal is more common on television news, we investigate whether or not television news portrayals of juvenile lawbreakers are dominated by representations of African Americans or Whites. Below, we outline prior content studies which have examined race and lawbreaking on television news. Following this we give an overview of the specific indices used to analyze race and juvenile lawbreaking in the current study.

## Prior Studies of Perpetrator Race on Local Television News

Recently, a number of studies have been conducted that investigate the role of news programming in portraying adults of color as criminals (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b;

Entman, 1992; Romer, Jamieson, & De Coteau, 1998). For example, Dixon and Linz (2000a) investigated portrayals of race and crime by utilizing three indices: intergroup measures (e.g., comparing Black to White perpetrators), inter-role measures (comparing Black perpetrators to police officers) and inter-reality measures (e.g., comparing the proportion of perpetrators portrayed on television news to governmental crime reports). They found that Blacks were twice as likely as Whites to be portrayed as perpetrators of crime on television news (Dixon & Linz, 2000a). In addition, African Americans were six times more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators than as officers in the news. Finally the inter-reality comparison revealed that Blacks represented approximately 37% of the perpetrators portrayed on television news while comprising only 21% of those arrested according to crime reports.

The Dixon and Linz (2000a) study cited above as well as most prior empirical studies of news media effects have concentrated on adults (Entman, 1992; Entman & Rojecki, 2000; Gilliam, Iyengar, Simon, & Wright, 1996; Turk, Richstad, Bryson, & Johnson, 1989). It is possible that the patterns of youth portrayals could be different from the pattern of adult portrayals. Youth commit far fewer crimes than adults and typically their behavior is inspired by slightly different motivations than adults (Bode, 1997). Prior content studies have counted the differences in the number of juvenile and adult criminals in newspapers and found that adults outnumbered juveniles (Graber, 1980). Content analyses that focused exclusively on juveniles have tallied the frequency of juvenile appearances and calculated how often they appeared in particular roles (Greenberg & Brand, 1994). We could locate no prior study which directly examined television news, juvenile lawbreaking and race. The current research attempts to overcome the limitations of these prior studies by documenting the race of juvenile criminals portrayed in TV news programming.

### Similarities Between Juveniles and Adult Perpetrators on Television News

We hypothesize that the racial representation of juvenile lawbreakers on television news will mirror the patterns that prior research has found regarding adult lawbreaking and race on news programs. African American juveniles will be overrepresented, Latino juveniles will be underrepresented and White juveniles will neither be over- nor underrepresented as perpetrators on television news. There are two reasons why this may be the case.

First, the prior research on adult lawbreaking strongly indicates that television news misrepresents Blacks as criminals and treats Latinos as if they are invisible. It appears to be a reasonable starting point to predict that depictions of juvenile crime and race portrayals on television news would mirror those of adults. Dixon and Linz (2000a & 200b) suggest that news gathering practices tend to place an emphasis on crimes that Blacks are more likely to commit, and that cultural barriers hinder greater coverage of Latino lawbreaking. Furthermore, they suggest that power relationships and stereotyping processes also contribute to the misrepresentation of people of color in the news. If these processes are at work with adults, there is no reason to believe that they would not also influence the depiction of juvenile lawbreakers.

The second reason why juvenile portrayals of race and lawbreaking may mirror those of adults has to do with the relative infrequency of school shootings. Although school shootings may increase the number of white juvenile defendants portrayed on television news, this may not be enough to overcome a general pattern of misrepresentation that emphasizes the lawbreaking behavior of juveniles of color. If the overrepresentation of Blacks and underrepresentation of Latinos are severe enough, there would not be enough "Columbine" school shooting situations featuring white criminal suspects to make the portrayal of race on television news comport with social reality.

In summary, we hypothesize that portrayals of juvenile lawbreaking by race on television news will be consistent with prior studies that focused on adults. In order to test this hypothesis, we conduct a content analysis of local television programming. Below, we explicate the indices used to assess the misrepresentation of juvenile lawbreaking by race.

### Investigating Juvenile Portrayals of Race and Law Breaking

In the current study we use two of the three indices used by Dixon and Linz (2000a) to investigate whether the portrayals of Black and Latino juvenile law breaking on television news differ from social reality. The first index is the "intergroup" comparison of juvenile lawbreakers by race and cultural group. The second index is the "inter-reality" comparison of law breakers presented on television news with crime reports obtained from the California Department of Justice. In this study, we do not utilize the inter-role comparison (which contrasts perpetrators with officers) because juveniles cannot be employed in law enforcement.

Researchers have used one or another of these comparisons in prior content analyses to investigate how adult African Americans, Latinos and Whites are represented on television news and other "reality-based" programming. This study, we believe, is the first to use these indices to investigate juvenile law breaking. Each comparison index provides different information about the portrayal of these groups on television news, and each carries underlying assumptions about the effects of exposure to news on viewers. A brief review of how past research has employed each of these comparisons and the interpretations lent to each measure is offered below.

Intergroup Comparisons of Law Breakers

The intergroup content measurement approach typically involves comparing portrayals of Blacks or Latinos to Whites portrayed in the media (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Entman, 1992, 1994). The intergroup comparison of juvenile perpetration involves contrasting the frequency of Latino and Black juvenile perpetrators on television news with the frequency of White juvenile lawbreakers. The intergroup measure is a convenient and easily calculated index of which racial groups are portrayed in a particular role. It offers us a useful way of documenting the strength of the linkage between the presentation of a particular racial group and a particular role on television news.

An illustration of the intergroup comparison approach for perpetrators is provided by Entman (1992) who performed a content analysis of 55 days of local television news in Chicago. An intergroup comparison of adult Whites to Blacks was undertaken in order to investigate differences in certain features of the portrayals of Blacks and Whites in crime stories. He found that Blacks (38%) accused of a crime were much more likely than similarly accused Whites (18%) to be shown in the grip of a restraining police officer. He also found that Black perpetrators (49%) were less likely to be named than White perpetrators (65%).

A content analysis of newspapers in Albuquerque, N.M. and San Antonio, Tx. demonstrates the use of the intergroup approach with Latinos. It was undertaken by Turk et al. (1989). Utilizing an intergroup comparison approach, they found that Latinos (26%) were more likely than Whites (17%) to be central characters in stories involving "problem" issues (e.g., judicial and crime news, news of riots and demonstrations, and accident and disaster news).

## The Utility of Intergroup Comparisons

Intergroup comparisons in content analysis are useful for at least two reasons. First, they offer us a convenient and easily calculated measure of the content of the television news environment with regard to race and crime. These summary measures can then be used to compare various forms of mass media content or document trends in television content over time. Second, intergroup comparisons are important because they represent specific mixtures of television content that may lead to particular psychological effects in viewers.

As with the risk-ratios employed by Gerbner and his colleagues in content analyses of the larger television environment, intergroup comparisons of juvenile perpetrators by race on local television news may be interpreted as indicators of the social reality potentially cultivated among news viewers (Gerbner, 1990; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980). The presumption here is that viewers embrace the version of the social world cultivated by television news and incorporate it into their view of social reality. The presentation of more Black than White juvenile lawbreakers on television news may lead viewers to believe that their social world is populated by young African Americans who are dangerous and prone to crime (Armstrong & Neuendorf, 1992; Gilliam et al., 1996; Johnson, Adams, Hall, & Ashburn, 1997).

In social psychological terms, if television news portrays significantly more Blacks and Latinos as juvenile perpetrators of crime than Whites, negative stereotypes of young Blacks and Latinos as criminals may be perpetuated in the minds of viewers. In sum, intergroup comparisons may be useful because they identify content that may increase or decrease the cognitive linkage between juveniles of color and criminal behavior.

### Inter-Reality Comparisons of Law Breakers

Intergroup comparisons allow us to measure the television environment and imagine effects in viewers' cognitive representations of the social world after exposure to television. However, these comparisons tell us little about the "accuracy" of the media portrayals or the stereotypes and beliefs that are subsequently cultivated in viewers. It may be the case that Blacks juveniles are, in fact, more likely than White juveniles to commit crime depending on what index of crime is used as a comparison point. In this sense, television news may disseminate an accurate picture of the world rather than cultivate a distorted view. Intergroup measures must therefore be anchored to objective indicators of social reality that are measured outside of the television environment both in order to evaluate claims of the accuracy of media representations, and in order to provide a basis for speculating on and evaluating the potential effects of news on viewers.

In order to make the claim that media portrayals overrepresent, underrepresent or accurately represent Black and Latino juveniles as perpetrators, intergroup comparisons must be augmented by other measures. Oliver (1994) investigated the extent to which Blacks were represented as criminals in police and crime reality programs shown in the 1991-92 Fall television schedule.[1] She employed an inter-reality approach by comparing television portrayals of criminal suspects to crime data collected by government law enforcement agencies. Oliver found that Blacks comprised 36% of the perpetrators on reality programs. She compared this finding to the percentage of Black criminal suspect arrests listed in the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports. Here, Blacks comprised only 30% of criminal suspects.

Another example of a study that utilized an inter-reality comparison was performed by Sorenson et al. (1998). They compared 2,782 stories featured in the Los Angeles Times about homicide with the 9,442 homicides that occurred in LA County from 1990-1994 according to official crime reports. They found that Latinos were underrepresented as homicide suspects, and that Black and Latino victims were underrepresented as well.

## The Utility of Inter-Reality Measures

Inter-reality comparisons of perpetrators on television with social indicators measured outside of the media, such as government reports, focuses our attention on certain psychological effects on viewers. For example, the overrepresentation of juvenile Blacks as lawbreakers may have the effect of distorting viewers' perceptions of young Blacks as dangerous in our society. Overrepresentation of Black juveniles as perpetrators of crime on television news compared to crime reports may facilitate fears of victimization by Black and Latino juvenile perpetrators among news viewers. These viewer fears would be "unrealistic" to the degree that they strayed significantly from the "social reality" of arrest records (Gilliam et al., 1996; Romer et al., 1998).

## Hypotheses

Based primarily upon prior research which suggests that Black and Latino adults are likely to appear more often than Whites as law-breakers, this research employs intergroup and inter-reality comparisons to test two hypotheses:

1) Black and Latino juveniles will appear as perpetrators at a higher rate compared to Whites.

This hypothesis is tested by intergroup comparisons, which measure the degree to which Black and Latino juveniles are portrayed as perpetrators compared to White juveniles. Prior work suggest that Black and Latino adults appear more often than Whites as perpetrators. We use this prior work to hypothesize here that the same pattern will hold for juveniles, in spite of the high profile school shootings which typically feature White perpetrators.

2) Black juveniles will be overrepresented, Latino juveniles will be underrepresented and White juveniles will neither be over- nor underrepresented as juveniles on television news.

This hypothesis is tested by an inter-reality comparison in which the proportion of juvenile lawbreakers on television news is compared to the proportion of juveniles arrested according to the Criminal Justice Profile for 1995 & 1996 published by the California Department of Justice (1996; 1997). If the proportion of perpetrators on television news is greater or smaller than the proportion noted in crime reports, this is a clear indication of overrepresentation and underrepresentation.

## Method

### Sample of Programs

News programs were drawn from broadcasts aired by Los Angeles-based stations to represent the population of interest: all local news programs aired in Los Angeles and Orange Counties. These two counties represent the primary metropolitan areas for Los Angeles-based stations (Nielsen, 1994). The sample in this study was drawn using procedures developed by researchers involved in the National Television Violence Study (NTVS) (Kunkel et al., 1996; Potter et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 1998).

### Obtaining a Representative Sample of the Program Population

The programs in the present study were selected with a modified version of the equal probability of selection method (EPSEM). With this method of selection every program has an equal chance, or opportunity, to appear in the sample. This method increases the chances that the sample represents the characteristics of the population of television news programs under study.

Two half-hour time slots (defined by hour of day and day of week) were randomly selected for each channel during each week that the sampling occurred. Once a time slot was selected, the TV Guide was consulted and the program corresponding to that time was entered into a scheduling grid several days before the target week of programming began. Programs were retained in their entirety regardless of the number of time slots they occupied. For example, if the time slot 4:30 was randomly selected and an hour long news program which began at 4:00 p.m. was identified in the TV Guide, the 4:00 p.m. program was selected for inclusion in the sample and permitted to occupy two half-hour time slots (4 p.m. - 5 p.m.).

## Basic Parameters of the Sample

The sampling frame for the present investigation was defined by four parameters: channels, program types, sampling times (i.e., times of day), and sampling periods (i.e., times of year). The following channels were included in the sample: KABC (ABC affiliate), KCBS (CBS affiliate), KNBC (NBC affiliate), KCAL, KCOP, FOX, and KTLA. Only breaking news programs (e.g., programs that self-identify as "news") were coded and all breaking news programs listed in TV Guide from 3:00 p.m. until 10:59 p.m. were eligible for inclusion in the sample (a total of 7 hours per day). The sampling period was two sets of 20 weeks. The first set began in October of 1995 and ended in June of 1996. The second set began in October of 1996 and ended in June of 1997. However, the time periods during certain holidays (e.g., Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter) were excluded from the sampling frame.

Using the sampling procedure described above, two seven-day composite weeks of news programming were produced. Virtually all news shows in the regular program schedule for each channel appeared in the final composite weeks. The taped news sample included 205 programs. A total of five (2%) were removed from the sample due to taping errors or other technical problems, yielding 200 programs.

## Definitions of Crime and Race

Definition of crime. Crime was defined as behavior or information either pertaining to the commission of a particular law-breaking act, or social or legal reaction to law-breaking more generally. Only those crimes (e.g., murder, arson, robbery) which are tracked by the U.S. Department of Justice and the State of California Justice Department were coded to compare the depiction of crime on the news with crime data.[2]

Definition of perpetrator race. To compare the race of juveniles portrayed on television news with the race of individuals noted in crime reports, the categories and definitions used by the California Department of Justice were employed in this study. Race included four categories: Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and Others (e.g., Asians).

Identification of race. The following apparent race indicators were used to assess the race of juvenile perpetrators: 1) shown on videotape, 2) mug shot shown, 3) artist's sketch shown, 4) photo shown, and 5) race is stated. When these more apparent indicators of race were not available, race was inferred based on characteristics of the story. Three variables were used: 1) surname (e.g., Martinez is associated with Latino), 2) family member of perpetrator is shown (e.g., White mother infers White perpetrator), and 3) prior news reports indicate race (e.g., School shooter identified in prior news reports as White).

Coding multiple perpetrators, judges, police officers, and prosecutors. In a few cases the race of multiple juvenile perpetrators had to be coded. First, coders used a majority rule when coding the race of multiple juvenile perpetrators on television news. In other words, the category for race was coded based on the attributes of the majority of characters in any one story. Second, when no clear majority arose, coders recorded the primary racial groups present and estimated the number of each group present. In cases where no clear number was given but coders could detect that multiple characters were involved, a conservative number of characters were counted. Third, these frequencies were summed into a final tally for each racial group and each race was tracked in the analysis.

## Levels of Analysis

The judgments and observations recorded for each instance of law breaking were organized into two levels or units of analysis: 1) crime story level, and 2) perpetrator of crime level.

Crime story level. News programs are generally composed of several segments or news stories. Only news stories that contained criminal behavior were analyzed. These crime stories represented the first level of analysis in the design. At the crime story level, the location of crimes (committed in Los Angeles or Orange County or not) was assessed.

Perpetrator level. Contained within many, but not all of the crime stories, were juvenile perpetrators of crime. The racial distributions of television news youth perpetrators were analyzed and compared to crime reports. Coders coded variables pertaining to: 1) the race (e.g., Black, White, Latino or Other) of perpetrators, 2) the crime (e.g., murder, arson) committed, and 3) the age (juvenile or not) of suspects.

## Coding and Reliability

Ten undergraduate students with strong academic records were selected to perform the coding of data for this project. Coders underwent approximately 30 hours of instruction in a small seminar class setting. Each coder received five identical programs that they were all required to code along with their regular coding assignment. The coding of these five programs provided the reliability data for this study.

## Measuring Reliability

The proportional reduction of error technique used in this study to assess coder consistency relied on the index $I_r$ (Dixon & Linz, 2000a; Imrich, Mullin, & Linz, 1995; Perreault & Leigh, 1989). Perreault and Leigh's (1989) $I_r$ was used as the index of reliability to allow for the likelihood that some coding categories may be infrequently used but may nevertheless be reliably coded (e.g., if the race of most defendants was truly infrequently reported on TV news as Black, coders would much more often be coding this variable as 0 [White] than as 1 [Black], and be accurate in doing so). Because other indices of reliability, such as Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960) or Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 1980), do not allow for this situation in their estimates of chance agreement (they assume that all categories are equally likely to be used by each judge), such indices are inappropriate for this data set. An inferential procedure was also used in order to determine the probability that each of the reliability coefficients could have occurred by chance alone. For each decision, a z-score was computed using the following formula developed by Potter et al. (1998) (See also Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999).

As displayed in Table 1, the reliability on each of the variables was quite high as indicated by the overall median level of agreement that ranged from .88 to 1.0. A confidence interval for each of the 70 reliability coefficients (14 variables on each of the 5 programs in the reliability test) was computed. Out of those 70 coefficients, only one of them, video of perpetrator of crime was too small to attain statistical significance ($p<.05$). Given that all the other coefficients for this variable did reach statistical significance over several trials, it was not eliminated from the analysis. Overall, the reliability assessments appear to establish strong confidence in the accuracy of the data reported in the study.

## Results

To allow for comparisons with government crime reports, only those television news crimes committed in Los Angeles and Orange Counties were included in the following analyses. In addition, only those stories that featured crimes that are monitored by the California Department of Justice were analyzed. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

### Intergroup Comparisons of Black to White and Latino to White Juvenile Perpetrators of Crime

Our first hypothesis predicted that Black and Latino juveniles will appear as perpetrators at a higher rate compared to Whites. This hypothesis was supported. As shown in Table 2, Black and Latino juveniles were more likely than White juveniles to be portrayed as perpetrators on television news when either all crimes, $\underline{X}^2$ (3, N = 51) = 10.57, $\underline{p}<.01$ or only felonies (e.g., murderers) were included in the analysis, $\underline{X}^2$ (3, N = 45) = 11.80, $\underline{p}<.01$.

### Inter-Reality Comparison of Perpetrators of Crime on Television News to California Department of Justice Criminal Justice Profile

Our second hypothesis predicted that Black juveniles will be overrepresented, Latino juveniles will be underrepresented and White juveniles will neither be over- nor underrepresented as juveniles on television news. This hypothesis was supported. Undertaking this analysis involved three steps. In the first step, the percentages of Black, White, Latino, and Other juveniles were calculated for Los Angeles and Orange County perpetrators portrayed on television news who were associated with crimes tracked by the California Department of Justice (1996; 1997). As Table 3 shows, 39% of all juvenile perpetrators portrayed on television news were Black, 29% were Latino, 24% were White, and 8% were "Other" (e.g., Native Americans, Asians). This trend is continued for felonies. As shown in Table 4, 38% of all juvenile felons portrayed on television news were Black, 33% were Latino, 24% were White and 4% were Other.

In step two, these television news proportions of juvenile perpetrators were subtracted from the proportion of juvenile perpetrators arrested according to the California Criminal Justice Profile 1995 & 1996 for Los Angeles and Orange County (1996; 1997). The resulting difference is represented in Table 3 and Table 4 as the percentage point differential. This gives us some indication of the size and direction of differences between television news and arrest reports. In the final step, sampling error was calculated because these proportions are estimates of population parameters from a sample of news programs. Therefore, a 95% confidence interval was calculated around each sample estimate of the proportion of juvenile perpetrators on television news (Moore & McCabe, 1989). This confidence interval is represented in the last column of Table 3 and Table 4. If the percentage point differential exceeded the 95% confidence interval, the corresponding television proportion was considered a statistically significant underrepresentation or overrepresentation.[3]

As Table 3 shows, Black juveniles were more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators of crime on television news (39%) than to be arrested according to crime reports (18%). Given the confidence interval of plus or minus 13 percentage points, this is a statistically significant 21 percentage point difference. Based on this interval, the difference between the proportion of Black juvenile perpetrators portrayed on television news and those arrested according to crime reports may be as low as 8 percentage points or as high as 34 percentage points.

This difference was continued for felonies. As Table 4 shows, Black juveniles were more likely to be portrayed as felons on television news (38%) than to be arrested for felonies (23%). Given the confidence interval of 14 percentage points for the television proportion, this difference is also statistically significant.

Tables 3 and 4 also display the percentage of juvenile Latino perpetrators portrayed on television news compared to the proportion of juvenile Latino perpetrators who were arrested. Latino juveniles were less likely to be portrayed as perpetrators of crime on television news (29%) than to be arrested (53%) according to crime reports. Given the 6% confidence interval, this difference is statistically significant. As displayed in Table 4, this trend continued for felonies. Latino juveniles were significantly less likely to be portrayed as felons on television news (33%) than to be arrested for felonies according to crime reports (54%).

As displayed in Table 3, White juveniles were no more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators of crime on television news (24%) than to be arrested according to crime reports (22%). This trend is continued for felonies. Table 4 shows that Whites were no more likely to be portrayed as juvenile lawbreakers on television news (4%), than to be arrested for felony offenses (15%).

Juvenile "Others" (e.g., Asians) were also no more likely to be portrayed as perpetrators on television news (8%) than to be arrested according to crime reports (7%). There were also no statistically significant differences between juvenile "Others" portrayed as felons on television news (4%) and "Others" arrested for felonies (8%).

## Discussion

Two indices were used in this study to produce an assessment of the portrayal of Blacks, Latinos, and Whites as juvenile lawbreakers on local television news. First, intergroup comparisons revealed that Black and Latino juveniles were more likely than White juveniles to be portrayed as perpetrators of crime on television news. Second, inter-reality comparisons revealed that Black juveniles were overrepresented, Latino juveniles were underrepresented, and White juveniles were neither under- nor overrepresented on television news.

Below we discuss some of the limitations of this research. Afterwards, we describe two phenomena that may explain the misrepresentations uncovered in this study. Following this, we discuss the potential effects and policy implications of the findings, particularly in light of the "drip, drip" and "drench" perspectives (Greenberg, 1988; Reep & Dambrot, 1989). Finally, we discuss some of the policy implications of these findings.

### Limitations of the Present Study

Only Los Angeles-based stations were included in the sample because they were drawn from the larger NTVS sample, which taped all of its programs in the Los Angeles market. In addition, Spanish-speaking stations were not included in the sample of programs analyzed. It is possible that the portrayal of Latino juvenile lawbreakers on these stations differs from the portrayals featured on mainstream broadcasts. However, many of these Spanish-speaking stations, including Telemundo, often use the same news feeds as mainstream stations. Therefore, the impact of Spanish-speaking stations on the underrepresentation of Latinos as juvenile perpetrators needs to be investigated more thoroughly in the future.

## What Causes Overrepresentation and Underrepresentation of Black and Latino Juveniles?

The overrepresentation of Black juveniles as perpetrators, underrepresentation of Latino juveniles as perpetrators and accurate representation of White juveniles as perpetrators observed in the current study can be explained through two complimentary perspectives. One of these perspectives focuses on power relationships, and the other focuses on economic interests. The power relationship perspective posits that White ownership of the media, ethnocentrism and stereotyping by Whites produces positive images of Caucasians and negative images of people of color. An economic interest perspective suggests that the newsgathering process produces an emphasis on "the deviant" (e.g., black super-predators) in order to produce high ratings. Both processes probably interact to produce the findings in this study.

Power structure theories and Black Super-predators. One of the more popular power structure theories is known as ethnic blame (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b; Romer et al., 1998). It could be argued that the overrepresentation of Black juvenile law breaking on television news is part of an "ethnic blame discourse" being carried out in the media (Romer et al., 1998). This discourse is ethnocentric talk that becomes routinized in everyday speaking and shapes the thoughts and actions of persons exposed to the discourse. The ethnic blame discourse frames problem behavior committed by ethnic others (e.g., Blacks and Latinos) as inter-group conflict and accentuates the harmful effects of the behavior on the in-group (e.g., Whites). Those who espouse this perspective claim that such a discourse is pervasive, that it occurs in interpersonal and mass media contexts, and that it affects both outgroup and ingroup members (Romer et al., 1998; Van Dijk, 1993). We believe that the ethnic blame discourse is an outgrowth of the stereotyping process whereby mere exposure to Blacks or Latinos or to stereotypic attributes regarding these groups (e.g., Black criminal) can unconsciously and automatically activate stereotypic associations (Dixon & Linz, 2000a, 2000b).

*Economic interests and Latino invisibility*. Although ethnic blame discourse is an intriguing explanation for the overrepresentation of juvenile Black law breaking found in the current investigation, it does not adequately explain the *underrepresentation* of juvenile Latinos as perpetrators. This Latino invisibility may in fact be due to the structural limitations or institutional biases that emphasize cost-cutting and profits over accuracy and completeness. The structural limitations perspective essentially posits that the newsgathering process has an effect on the way that messages are framed (Graber, 1980; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

For example, perhaps the lack of focus on Latino juvenile perpetration results from journalists who struggle with the difficulty of reporting on the Latino community due to language and cultural barriers. For instance, Fitzgerald (1994) reported that Latinos were underrepresented as news reporters. Latino reporters fluent in Spanish may be able to traverse the barriers that limit the access of English-speaking news agencies to Latinos. As U.S. population demographics continue to change, news agencies may begin to work harder at courting the Latino majority (Stanley, 1996). As this occurs, it is possible that Latino underrepresentation will begin to disappear as more reporters are hired and as more relevant programming is targeted at this community.

In summary, power structure perspectives such as ethnic blame, and economic interests perspectives rooted in the structural limitations of news provide the explanation for the portrayals uncovered by this study. Ethnic blame provides support for why Black juvenile super-predator images dominate crime stories by suggesting that news producers are affected by stereotyping processes. Structural limitations suggest that Latino underrepresentation is tied to newsgathering processes which cannot easily overcome the cultural and language barriers which make it difficult to cover this community. Below, we discuss some of the potential effects of the depictions uncovered by the current study.

### The Effects of Misrepresentation: Drip drip, or Drench Effects?

The findings in this study suggest that the Black super-predator is a fairly consistent staple in television news. This suggests that news viewers over time will receive a steady incremental dosage of Black juvenile criminals. Gerbner and other communication theorists have observed that each instance of exposure to such imagery might shape the views of perceivers (Gerbner, 1990; Gerbner et al., 1980). Some scholars have referred to this conceptualization as a type of "drip, drip" hypothesis (Greenberg, 1988; Reep & Dambrot, 1989). In other words, perceptions of social reality are shaped by viewing many separate manifestations of the stereotype (e.g. Black juvenile lawbreakers are super-predators).

*Drip, drip hypothesis and stereotyping*. The mechanisms associated with a "drip drip" hypothesis have been explicate by a large body of scholarship in social psychology (Bargh, Chen, & Burrows, 1996; Dasgupta, McGhee, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2000; Hewstone, 1990; Rudman, Greenwald, Mellott, & Schwartz, 1999; von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995). These psychological mechanisms would predict that as a result of exposure to the super-predator imagery, White viewers would be more likely to perceive of all juveniles criminals as Black juvenile criminals and endorse harsh punitive measures for juvenile lawbreakers (Gilliam & Iyengar, 1998; Gilliam et al., 1996). White viewers' social judgements about Black juvenile criminals and juvenile crime policy would be based on the notion that African Americans have a predisposition to commit crime that must be curbed by active police intervention (Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979).

The drench hypothesis. Even though, the "drip, drip" hypothesis and the stereotyping mechanisms explicated above appear to be a powerful way to conceptualize the potential impact of media messages that emphasize Black juvenile criminality, Greenberg (1988) has advanced the notion of an alternative "drench" hypothesis. The drench hypothesis suggests that critical, memorable, vivid, and unusual images may contribute more to perceptions of outgroups than incremental viewing of stereotypes. Under this notion, although school shootings are rare and apparently do not displace the pervasive imagery which associates Blacks with perpetration, school violence episodes can be significant drench events that influence perceptions of juvenile lawbreaking. As a result, people's conceptions of juvenile criminality may come to involve both African American and White perpetrators.

Future research. It is important to engage in a set of follow-up studies which will test whether drip or drench effects are in operation with regards to televised news content of juvenile perpetration. We suggests a two-pronged approach at undertaking this future research. First, we suggest that future studies investigate the effect of the Black super-predator depiction using the current content findings to develop stimuli that closely mirror television news. Second, we would suggest that future studies investigate whether incremental exposure to the Black super-predator or "drench" exposure to school shootings featuring White perpetrators produce more substantial changes in people's conceptions of juvenile crime and criminality.

### Policy Implications

The current findings suggest that media agencies should carefully weigh the news value of airing stories about juvenile crime, and they should be conscious of the possibility of misrepresenting the extent to which juveniles of color are involved in illegal activity. In the same way that media organizations often avoid revealing the names of juveniles in newscasts, they should also avoid releasing information regarding juveniles suspects' race. Furthermore, news agencies need to provide a better context for juvenile crime than is currently featured on news programs (Dixon & Linz, 2000a).

Politicians and commentators also need to understand that the super-predator image is largely a myth created by distorted news imagery. Lawmakers should be circumspect about supporting additional punitive measures to address juvenile criminality, especially if that support is the result of television news coverage. The current study demonstrates that television news depicts a racial misrepresentation of juvenile criminality. Instead of increased punitive measures, politicians should consider the advice of criminology experts who have suggested that the best way to stem juvenile criminality is to limit access to guns (Dohrn, 1997; Montgomery, 1997). Legislators should reject the super-predator stereotype and the notion that there is a serious juvenile crime wave (Dohrn, 1997; Snyder, 1999). Afterwards, they should focus on ways to ensure that guns stay out of the hands of youths.

## Footnotes

1. These programs typically employ dramatizations of actual crimes interspersed with narration from and interviews with police officers and included Cops, Top Cops, America's Most Wanted, FBI, The Untold Story, and American Detective.

2. Arrest rates themselves may be a function of racial discrimination. Jones (1986) reports that Blacks are arrested twice as often as Whites, and Blacks are jailed at a rate more than four times their proportion in the population. Despite this potential bias, these reports are used for three reasons. First, the only government information that was available to us regarding the race of perpetrators was arrest rate. Second, there is no evidence to suggest that viewers make meaningful distinctions between perpetrators who are accused and sought for a crime versus those who have been arrested for law breaking. Third, public officials and other agencies use these reports to develop policy responses to criminal activity.

3. The point of the inter-reality comparison is to compare television portrayals to some other indicator of social reality in order to create a precise index of overrepresentation or underrepresentation. However, the arrest rates used in the current study only count each juvenile defendant once. Some racial groups may have their stories repeated on the news more often than others, and other racial groups may be portrayed as sought more than others. In order to ensure that there were no disparities across racial groups in terms of who was portrayed as sought and who was repeated, two chi-square analyses were conducted. All of the racial groups had approximately equal numbers of sought juvenile perpetrators portrayed on television news, $\underline{X}^2$ (3, N = 544) = 2.63, $\underline{p}<.452$, and approximately equal numbers of repeated perpetrators on television news, $\underline{X}^2$ (3, N = 213) = 1.32, $\underline{p}<.723$.

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Table 1

Reliabilities for Content Measures

| Measures | KCBS 11/08 | KNBC 10/24 | KCOP 05/06 | KCAL 02/02 | KABC 04/25 | Range | Overall Median |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | |
| News Story Level Variables | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| Location of crime | .88 | .88 | .89 | .84 | .87 | .84-.89 | .88 |
| | | | | | | | |
| Defendant Level Variables | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| Crime committed | .66 | .93 | .88 | .84 | .82 | .66-.93 | .84 |
| Race of def | .92 | .95 | .96 | .99 | .94 | .92-.99 | .96 |
| Age of defendant | .95 | .99 | 1.0 | .96 | 1.0 | .95-1.0 | .99 |
| | | | | | | | |
| Apparent Race Indicators | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| Video of def | .83+ | .99 | .95 | 1.0 | .94 | .83-1.0 | .95 |
| Mug shot of def | 1.0 | .97 | .99 | 1.0 | 1.0 | .97-1.0 | 1.0 |
| Artist sketch of def | 1.0 | .96 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | .96-1.0 | 1.0 |
| Photo of def | 1.0 | .93 | .94 | 1.0 | 1.0 | .93-1.0 | 1.0 |
| Race stated | 1.0 | .93 | .98 | .98 | 1.0 | .93-1.0 | .98 |
| | | | | | | | |
| Inferred Race Indicators | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| Infer from surname | 1.0 | .98 | .97 | 1.0 | 1.0 | .97-1.0 | 1.0 |
| Infer from family | 1.0 | .98 | 1.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 | .98-1.0 | 1.0 |
| Infer from p/news | 1.0 | .95 | .98 | 1.0 | 1.0 | .95-1.0 | 1.0 |
| | | | | | | | |

Key: + =p>.05 coefficients without + = p<.05

Table 2

Intergroup comparisons of Black to White and Latino to White Juvenile Perpetrators of Crime Portrayed on Television News

| | *Black /White Juvenile Perpetrator*[a] | *Latino/ White Juvenile Perpetrator*[b] |
|---|---|---|
| All Perpetrators | 1.66 (20/12) | 1.25 (15/12) |
| Felony Perpetrators | 1.54 (17/11) | 1.36 (15/11) |

$\underline{X}^2$ (3, N = 51) = 10.57, $\underline{p}$<.01 (all perpetrators)

$\underline{X}^2$ (3, N = 45) = 11.80, $\underline{p}$<.01 (felony perpetrators)

[a,b] Numbers outside the parentheses are ratios. Inside the parentheses are the raw figures used to calculate the ratios. A ratio greater than 1.00 indicates that Blacks and Latinos are more likely to be perpetrators of crime than Whites. For instance, a 2.00 under the Black/White Perpetrator column would indicate that for every White perpetrator there are 2.00 Black perpetrators portrayed on television news.

Table 3

Race of Juvenile Perpetrators Arrested According to Crime Reports Compared with the Racial Make-up of Juvenile Perpetrators on Television News

| *Race* | *Arrest Rate*[a] *%* | *TV Perp.*[b] *%* | *Percentage Point Differential*[c] | *95% Confidence Interval %* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black | 18 | 39 | +21* | + / - 13 |
| White | 22 | 24 | +02 | + / - 12 |
| Latino | 53 | 29 | -18* | + / - 6 |
| Other | 7 | 8 | +1 | + / - 53 |

[a] Percentage of Juvenile Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and Others who were arrested according to the California Department of Justice Criminal Profile for 1995, 1996 & 1997.

[b] Percentage of Juvenile Blacks, Whites, Latinos and Others who appeared as perpetrators on local television news.

[c] Difference between the television percentage and the arrest rate percentage for each racial group (TV % - Arrest %)

* Percentage point differential outside the confidence interval

Table 4

Race of Juvenile Felons Arrested According to Crime Reports Compared with the Race of Juvenile Felony Perpetrators on Television News

| *Race* | *Arrest Rate[a] %* | *TV Perp.[b] %* | *Percentage Point Differential[c]* | *95% Confidence Interval %* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Black | 23 | 38 | +15* | + / - 14 |
| White | 15 | 24 | +9 | + / - 12 |
| Latino | 54 | 33 | -21* | + / - 14 |
| Other | 8 | 4 | -4 | + / - 6 |

[a] Percentage of Juvenile Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and Others who were arrested felons according to the California Department of Justice Criminal Profile for 1995, 1996 & 1997.

[b] Percentage of Juvenile Blacks, Whites, Latinos and Others who appeared as felony perpetrators on local television news.

[c] Difference between the television percentage and the arrest rate percentage for each racial group (TV % - Arrest %)

* Percentage point differential outside the confidence interval

# Redefining homelessness
## How Tucson recyclers resist the media's stereotyping

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## Redefining homelessness:
## How Tucson recyclers resist the media's stereotyping

The couple Stone and Sue, though homeless, could not be called "invisible." They stand out like a pair of post-modern Joads, tooling around the city of Tucson with their household possessions piled on the backs of their bikes, a trailer hauling their dog Cheyenne in tow. They could not be characterized as "disaffiliated," the tag scholars (Bahr and Caplow 1973) pinned on the Skid Row homeless of the '50s and '60s. The couple have been married for 14 years, and have several connections to both the homeless and the housed.

Nor could they be stereotyped as "bums." They work eight hours a day "dumpster diving," as the street term goes. This involves climbing into a string of dumpsters to scavenge for recyclable aluminum cans, which are then redeemed at commercial recycling centers paying an average of 32 cents per pound. Because their day's earnings rarely exceed $10, the couple spend the balance of their waking hours scrounging for necessities, along with a little "salutary" pot or pouch tobacco. As Stone said, "surviving is a constant, 24-hour, seven-days-a-week *business*."

The fact is the couple do tackle the task of survival as if it were their own, entrepreneurial, ma-and-pa business, and this is yet another way in which they defy the stereotype of homeless people. For the purposes of this paper, it is a crucial way.

With the advent of the so-called "new homeless" in the '80s came new variations of old stereotypes of homeless people. The images purveyed by the media were of shopping bag ladies, drug addicts and an intransigent "underclass" of winos, vagrants and bums.

Behind the images was a pervasive discourse that, according to sociologist Talmadge Wright (1997), ignored the Reagan-era structural inequalities driving the new homelessness to talk about individual responsibility and success. The author wrote:

> Homeless street people were criminalized, treated academically and popularly as submembers of the "underclass" if they talked back, or presented as charitable victims worthy of middle class affection if they stayed in their place. In either case homeless street persons were and still are . . . rendered as either passive victims of circumstances or as possible threats, as members of the "dangerous classes." (1997:15)

The homeless discourse has its parallel in the development discourse targeting the Third World's "underdeveloped" poor. Both discourses are promulgated by the media, academics, policymakers and agencies in the poverty-fighting business. Both, if only by targeting the poor for "remediation," tend to stigmatize the poor as the market's failures. Both are driven by the same liberal, free-market ideology. In Gosta Esping-Andersen's (1990) formulation, the ideology is a "logic" driving welfarism in all liberal-capitalistic regimes.

The logic is inherently contradictory; in the name of a "free market," it proscribes government intervention to correct those very disparities of wealth and power that make the market anything but "free." In translating the logic into policy, policymakers are driven by the logic's contradictions to overlook the real problem of a maldistributive market, and target the poor instead as the problem that must be "remediated" – largely through market-conforming, means-tested benefits that are deliberately kept below the lowest prevailing wage. The welfare benefits and services are never enough to bail the poor out of poverty; they are just enough to keep the poor poor and so reinforce the market's disparities.

Esping-Andersen's focus is on the structural forces driving welfare. But the homeless discourse could be seen as a structural force in its own right – a force driven by the same logic to stigmatize the homeless, primarily by shifting blame away from the market's flaws to the market's failures. Few American studies of homelessness take this perspective. According to Wright (1997: 20-21), most scholars have followed the flow of research money into areas of study focusing on the "pathologies" of the new homeless. The focus, he wrote, has shifted attention away from the structural inequalities that brought the newly immiserated women, children and marginal workers into the streets to begin with.

The authors of the Development Dictionary (Sachs 1992) do see discourse as a structural force, and their analysis of development discourse in the Third World could be said to implicitly extend to the discourse shaping uneven economic development in the First World. The authors do not, however, explicitly make this connection, nor do they examine the ways in which the development discourse, particularly the discourse aimed at alleviating Third World poverty, plays out on the ground, in the lives of the poor.

This paper applies the Development Dictionary's analysis to the question of how the homeless experience, and possibly challenge or resist, the stigmatizing discourse coming down from on high. The paper is based on a case study of five homeless recyclers in Tucson – the couple Stone and Sue and three of their friends and occasional campmates. (See Table 1 for the informants' demographic profiles.) The study combines field observations of the informants' day-to-day routines, collected during a three-month investigation in 1998, with both casual and in-depth interviews.

The paper takes Paulo Freire's (1990) broad conception of communication as a two-way, dialogical process as its premise going into the analysis. Freire's own premise is that even the most oppressed groups can and do resist their oppression, primarily by seizing the power inherent in communication to "name the world," or redefine the terms that oppress them (1990: 13). This analysis focuses on how the informants redefine the liberal discourse's stigmatizing terms so as to create their own social reality.

## Methods

The paper's analysis is based on an ethnographic case study of five Tucson recyclers, conducted over a three-month period in 1998. The study combined field observations of the informants' daily activities with both casual and in-depth interviews. In analyzing the data, I took an approach that could be compared to David L. Altheide's (1996) ethnographic approach to analyzing media text. This section begins by discussing the data analysis, then delves into a more detailed discussion of the data-gathering procedures.

### *Data Analysis*

Altheide sees textual analysis as a mode of "fieldwork," in which the researcher continually interacts with the text to tease out the text's latent cultural meanings (1996: 13-14). The reflexivity and interactivity that are inherent in any textual analysis, and that are regarded as researcher biases in conventional content analysis, are recognized here as strengths and systematized into strategies for moving iteratively between text and interpretation. The approach places the researcher, as a participant observer, at the center of the analytical process and sees the text itself as both a cultural product and a process for producing cultural meaning. The approach, as Altheide described it, is similar to grounded theory, but is not as rigorously oriented toward developing testable hypotheses as a foundation for theory. Hence, the coding of data is looser, the codes developing as the researcher develops concepts.

There is, of course, a difference between taking an ethnographic approach to analyzing media text and actually doing ethnography. In doing ethnography, the researcher ever interacts with informants in the field and interprets their everyday actions and words, so that interactivity and reflexivity are built into the very text, or the field notes and recorded interview transcripts. But the data here can still be seen in Altheide's terms as an interactive process of interpretation. I interacted with the informants in producing the text, and the informants interacted with me in producing cultural meaning. Hence, though I did not follow Altheide's protocol for analyzing text step by step, I did take his overall approach in conceptualizing my data as the product of the interaction between me and my informants in their discursive production of meaning.

I also coded the data in the way Altheide prescribed. First I coded the data for recurring topics. Then I categorized the topics according to recurring themes in an iterative process that took me back and forth between the text and the codes. As the themes began to emerge, so did the idea that they actually represented the sites where informants symbolically struggled to redefine the terms that stigmatized the homeless as the "bums" and "laggards" of the neoliberal market. Hence, I further categorized the themes into what I called "domains," or overarching themes, representing the symbolic sites of struggle. (See Table 2 for the categorization of themes into domains.) The domains became the basis for my argument that the informants, in their day-to-day material struggle to survive, also struggled to redefine reality and themselves.

### *Data gathering*

This study began as a class project for a graduate seminar on ethnography at the University of Arizona at Tucson. During my first outing in the field I met Stone and Sue, the key informants of the study, at the Toole Avenue soup kitchen, a converted produce warehouse in downtown Tucson colloquially known as "Toolie." I proceeded to follow the couple on their daily rounds, at least once a week over the next three months, gradually expanding my study to include three of the couple's friends.

I took what anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1972) described as a "thick description" approach to data gathering. The approach involves being a participant observer in the day-to-day lives of the informants. The aim is to collect layer upon layer of details describing the most mundane minutia of the informants' daily lives, so the researcher can ultimately flush out the larger meanings buried in the commonplace things people do and say.

### *Selection*

I purposively selected the study's five informants as representatives of the so-called "invisible," or unsheltered, homeless who are rarely captured in shelter-centered surveys (Snow and Anderson 1993:18-19). The informants here tend to deviate from the usual demographic profile painted by surveys, probably precisely because most surveys are skewed toward the shelters' "captive" populations who can be administered questionnaires. The couple Sue and Stone, for example, are among only small percentages of homeless nationally who are married, earn their own incomes or live on the streets for more than two years (Rossi 1989). The couple claimed to have cycled on and off the streets for the past 14 years.

What made the couple stand out at first sight was the tableau of family life they had etched out for themselves in the Toolie parking lot: All of their possessions along with their latest dumpster finds – a teddy Stone and a couple of Piers Anthony novels – were stacked on their bikes. Sue fiddled with an alarm clock, periodically setting it off, and offered cookies to bystanders. All the while she made motherly asides to her dog Cheyenne: "God, I hate this place. Ain't that right, Cheyenne? Momma hates this place."

I did not go into the field with a focused research question until my first sight of Sue essentially put the question for me. Her tiny gestures toward crating some sense of home or family in the midst of destitution suggested that the homeless, in their material struggle to survive, might also symbolically struggle, in Freire's (1990) terms, to define their social reality. Hence, I sought to discover how my informants did define reality in their everyday practices and discourse.

### *Gaining access*

Selecting the couple was simple enough; gaining access into their lives was another matter. At first glance, it would seem that access is assured, as the homeless are forced to live exposed on the streets 24 hours a day. But precisely because they are more exposed, the homeless have developed an arsenal of defenses to ward off cops, reporters, government bureaucrats and probing researchers. Even among their cohorts, the homeless regard direct inquires into personal matters as something of an ethical breach of an invisible line they draw between the public and the private. They deal with errants in much the same way as they deal with people barging uninvited into what they regard as the "private" grounds of their squatter camps.

Outsiders are similarly barred from barging into their private lives. I was probably able to overcome this barrier because I adopted the stance of student to the couple's stance of teachers from our first meeting on. I took the stance naturally, as I *was* there to learn whatever the couple wished to teach me about their lives on the street. I also seemed to gain the couple's trust by demonstrating my willingness to "get down" and accompany them on their dumpster-diving rounds.

This is not to say the couple initially welcomed me into their lives with open arms. There was still that barrier against outsiders, which was all the more pronounced in my case because the couple suspected me at first of being a "narc." (As they later explained, they thought I was too "clean cut" to be anything but an undercover narcotics agent.) Hence, when I first approached Sue to interview her in the Toolie parking lot, she drifted away and Stone suddenly materialized at my side to casually inquire as to what I wanted. I explained that I was a graduate student studying the homeless. His response: "Really, the only way to find out what it's like out here is to do what we do, live like we have to live." I saw this as an opening and immediately seized it, asking Stone if I could follow him and his wife on their daily rounds. Stone was noncommittal until his wife rejoined us and the three of us chatted awhile. Then they both consented.

***Procedures***

Observing and interviewing the informants was mostly a matter of hanging out with them, making conservation and listening. Especially listening. I did not conduct formal or structured interviews, as these were not likely to reveal much about the hidden aspects of their lives. Instead, I let the conversation flow naturally, in a way that allowed the informants to tell their experiences in their own time, in their own way.

I did casually interview the informants, in the sense that I prodded them to elaborate on a thought or flesh out a story. But I did this unobtrusively, simply by putting my questions colloquially and along the lines of the conversation. The advantage to this casual style of interviewing was that it lay open areas of their lives I would not have known existed otherwise. But to investigate these new regions, I occasionally had to abandon the conversational mode and switch to more directed questioning.

On these occasions, I went into the field with a sketchy schedule of questions and, essentially, primed the informants for a little more systematic style of interviewing by announcing that I had come on "business" or that I needed their help in doing my research. Shortly before leaving the field, I also interviewed the couple for their life stories. In this case, I followed the academic procedures for oral-history interviewing, obtaining their explicit consent beforehand, tape-recording the two-hour interview and later transcribing the tapes.

In observing the informants, I attempted to get as close to their experiences as I could without actually participating in them myself my crawling into dumpsters, panhandling or smoking pot. I made one exception to this rule when I periodically camped out with the couple. Otherwise I played a role falling somewhere in-between full and non-participant observer, described by ethnographers Snow and Anderson (1993: 24) as the "buddy researcher" role.

But then this is not really a one-sided "role" one assumes. It is more of a natural, two-way process of building rapport and friendships with informants, largely by hanging out with them from day to day. "As a friend," Snow and Anderson wrote,

> the buddy-researcher provided his companions with minor necessities on occasion, such as small loans that were not expected to be repaid, clothes, rides in an old Toyota, and a

> sympathetic ear for their hopes, troubles and fears. The buddy role entailed receiving as well as giving. The homeless shared some of their resources with the researcher, who as a friend was expected to accept such offers. (1993: 24)

This describes my own relationship with my informants, except that I never made loans, small or otherwise, and was careful to keep cash out of the equation. My training as a former journalist had taught me that money could directly influence sources and even compromise the study in unanticipated ways. Sharing *things* was another matter. I freely passed out cigarettes and food and shared the informants' meals and pouch tobacco in turn, as all of this conformed to their own notions of reciprocity. On occasion my informants did me big favors, and I repaid in kind. For example, when Stone, a crack amateur bike mechanic, repaired the gears of my second-hand bike, I repaid the favor by bringing the couple a few tins of tobacco and a bag of groceries they could cook over a tiny camper's stove at their campsite.

Playing "buddy researcher" complicated my research role but never compromised it. I never ceased to be a researcher, and always identified myself as such in all of my encounters with Tucson's street people. Indeed, I occasionally had to remind them of the fact once they began to take my presence on the streets for granted. If nothing else told them my status, then my practice of jotting notes would. I took notes openly in almost every conceivable situation – when people were eating, sleeping, washing up, making out, smoking pot, dumpster diving, relieving themselves in the bushes. Here again, my experience as a former journalist had taught me that openly jotting notes rarely inhibits the action, while it does cut down on the distortions that come with recollection.

### *Problems*

In initially focusing on Stone and Sue, I faced the problem inherent in all single-case studies. The argument for doing single-case studies is that one gains in depth what one sacrifices in scope. But the sociological import of the study also will be lost unless the researcher can generalize from the specific, tying the case to a theory or to the target population from which the case was drawn.

The couple not only represented Tucson's unsheltered homeless, but also proved to be my conduit into that world. Stone called this the "wild side" of homelessness – a side in which homeless work their own enterprises in the shadow economy, organize into ad hoc families for mutual protection and build a smattering of secluded camps, some of them virtual villages inhabited by 20 or more people in tarps, tents, cardboard hutches and earthen pits.

In initiating me into this world, the couple helped to broaden my focus, first by introducing me to friends whom I gradually incorporated into the study. Second, the couple sketched out the sociological lay of the land – identifying the different types of street people, the daily routines each type followed, the places were they camped or sold drugs. Third, they paved the way for me to move freely through the streets by vouching for my trustworthiness. This usually was done with a few words introducing me as a friend, a "trooper," or a "good kid."

## Narrative analysis

In the Development Dictionary (Sachs 1992), some 17 scholars critique the terms of a development discourse they see as a structural force, a production of reality, that has done as much as the multi-billion-dollar international aid industry to shape the Third World along the lines of a neoliberal blueprint. This paper brings their analysis to the ground, to the First World setting of Tucson's streets, to discover how a small group of recyclers experience, and possibly challenge or resist, the media's stigmatizing discourse on homelessness.

The five informants of this study saw the homeless discourse itself as the problem. In all of their discussions, their central concern was how the discourse defined them, and how they defined themselves. This concern tended to override their more material concerns for day –to-day survival. Their days revolved around finding food and shelter, but their talk revolved around their sense of being stigmatized, and their struggle to redefine the terms that stigmatized them. Their talk could be compared to the academic critiques of development, in the sense that both struggle over the meaning of the terms that perpetuate the liberal discourse, hence the inequalities of the neoliberal market. The comparison, of course, ends there. The informants of this study were not making structural critiques; they did not see their struggle over meaning as anything more than the sheer struggle to survive.

Nor did they experience the discourse at the same level as the academics. The homeless, generally, are so resource-poor and marginalized that they rarely see TV or newspapers, much less speak to policymakers or politicians. A discourse formulated at remote, policymaking levels can only enter their lives indirectly. The informants of this study were not conscious of a discourse as much as they felt its pervasive effects. They were acutely aware of being stigmatized. They saw their stigmatization as coming from the agencies closest to them on the streets – the police, shelters, soup kitchens and social service agencies. They made no distinction between the police and agencies in the business of "helping" the poor. Both were seen as part of "the system." The system, in turn, was seen primarily as a system for oppressing the homeless. "People like [Stone, Duke] and myself," said Biker Billy, "we don't depend on the system to take care of us, because we know better. The system is what put people on the streets in the first place."

The word "system" figured large in their conversations; it could refer variously to the police, shelters, the churches, the media, the government, the entire housed world. But the connotation was always that of a vast panoply of forces all working to oppress the homeless, primarily by blaming them for the problem of homelessness. The connotation is clear in Stone's description of his dealings with police:

> We're not allowed to eat, sleep, urinate, take a crap. These are normal functions we have a right to do. I know a guy who got taken to jail last week, for trespass, 'cause he opened up somebody's water spicket. There was a policeman named Bronco Billy who *killed* homeless people in Sacramento, all over the fact we don't live in houses . . . . I know why the homeless *hate* authority. 'Cause I've seen what people in authority do to the homeless. But yet if you sit down with homeless people, and *be* down with them, and say, "I'm hungry," watch what they do. They'll panhandle – shit, they'll *steal* to feed you. Joe Blow won't. He'll tell you, "Go away, I'll call the police." Joe Blow will tell you, "Get a job."

"Joe Blow" was Stone's name for a citizen of the housed world, a representative of the system. Stone usually put into Joe Blow's mouth the stigmatizing rhetoric he experienced on a wider scale. Harry did the same when he conjured the specter of the "preacher man." The figures personalized forces too big to name. For Biker Billy, the city's church-run soup kitchens were the personification of the system:

> They'll give you enough to hang on. They keep you in limbo. But there's nothing done [to remediate the problem of homelessness]. These preachers sitting in their big fancy churches, making a hundred-thousand bucks a year, how would they relate to the Gospel teachings? To the suffering out here? The ones in charge want to keep things this way. It's all about money.

Though most of the informants could not easily name the power at work in their lives, their sense of being stigmatized permeated almost every discussion – so much so that they had turned the slur "get a job" into a greeting they routinely used among each other. The effects of the discourse were evident in the *way* they expressed their stigmatization; it was in the same market terms with which the discourse defined them: as the market's rejects, "bums," worthless, irredeemable. Hence, Stone described his sense of being stigmatized in terms of the slur, "get a job." Duke, in the following exchange, expressed it in terms of a paycheck:

> Duke: "These people, living in their houses, running us down 'cause we're sleeping out here --. What they don't realize is, they're one paycheck away from where we are."
>
> Writer: "How do they run you down?"
>
> Duke: "They shout at us, 'Get a job, get off the street.'"
>
> Stone: "What I don't understand is, why do you run me down and you don't even know me. You don't know my name. You don't know anything about me."
>
> Sue: "And we *do* have a job. We *are* working. *Survival* is working."

The discussion began with stigmatizing market terms, but it ended with the informants redefining the terms "job" and "work," redefining themselves in the process as workers whose worth lay in their ability to survive on the streets. Survival itself is a "business," as Stone put it in another exchange, "a constant, 24-hour, seven-days-a-week *business.*"

The excerpt illustrates the way in which the informants' sense of stigmatization almost automatically entailed a struggle to redefine the stigmatizing terms, so as to assert their intrinsic worth. The words themselves become the sites for their struggle over meaning. Seen in this light, the coding of their words into "domains," or overriding themes, becomes a delineation of the sites of their struggle. (See Table 2 for the list of domains.) The domains of "work," "commodities," "street system of exchange" and "home" represent the informants' struggle to redefine the terms of the discourse that do the most to define them as the market's failures.

The domain of "home," for example, represents their struggle to redefine their squatters' camps as home. (See glossary in the appendix for the definition of camps.) Harry, in discussing the city's bulldozing of a large squatters' camp in Tucson, explained: "It was a big deal, because that was their *home.* Most people, if they have a tent, that's all they have." He had also composed a poem about the camp's razing:

> You call it a shantytown,
> I call it home.
> They took away our homeland,
> And they put us in their dump.
> We raised a camp and pitched a tent,
> Then they kicked us in the rump . . . .

Only rarely did the informants make their struggle to redefine the term so explicit. More often it was embedded in the everyday things they did or said. Stone, for example, invited this writer to drink from his water jug with the words: "You're in *my* home now." A handmade sign saying "Home sweet home" was pinned to the post of the couple's tent. But on one occasion, Sue and Shadow, a visitor to the couple's camp, did make the idea explicit when they corrected this writer's use of the word "homeless":

> Shadow: "We don't say 'homeless.'"
>
> Sue: "Oh yeah, I forgot to say something about that. A lot of people don't like to be called 'homeless,' 'cause 'homeless' means you don't have a home." She spread out her hands to encompass the couple's camp. "We have a home here – we just don't have a house."

The domain of "commodities" was another site of struggle. All of the informants were dumpster divers who redefined trash as a commodity – a "score" or a "find" that had value in terms of the street's own system of exchange. Trash is "saleable," as Duke and Sue explained:

> Sue: "It's not the cans so much as the other things we find in the dumpsters. You find knickknacks, some of it saleable. You find radios, cassette tapes, knives."
>
> Writer: "How do you know if it's saleable?"
>
> Sue: "If it works and looks good, it's saleable. If I would buy it, then somebody else would. There's nothing out here you can't sell, really. The only thing I *won't* sell is my ass.
>
> Writer: "How do you find buyers?"
>
> Sue: "You just hang around your own kind. If you have a friend who has a friend who goes to the bread line, he'll know somebody. They'll pass the word."
>
> Duke: "You get to talking to people. They'll say, 'I need this or that.' You say, 'Well, I got something here. You can have it for $2.' That's all it takes."
>
> Writer: "Do you make more money in saleable items or cans?"
>
> Sue: "Depends. Up in Greasewood National Forest [west of Tucson], it was more saleables, because people there are more high class. The more high class, the more they

throw away. 'Cause they have no respect for money, no respect for the dollar. They know whatever they throw away, they can replace."

The discussion ends with the idea of trash as rich people's throwaways. But the very act of salvaging the trash is an act of redeeming the meaning of the term as something saleable, hence usable to people on the streets. The streets themselves are a "market" – another domain – and the process of salvaging trash is "work," the most important domain. Here the term "work" became something more than the site of a merely symbolic struggle. The term was inseparably connected to how the informants defined themselves – how they asserted their worth in the face of the dominant discourse's stereotyping of the homeless as an intransigent underclass of winos, derelicts and bums. The informants' struggle to redefine the term "work" also defined their daily routines.

Though most of the informants here combined recycling with other survival strategies, they structured their day around recycling and did the work of recycling as if it were indeed a "business," or a 9-to-5 job. Indeed, they defined all of their survival strategies as "work," including the considerable labor involved in camping outdoors. So in a large measure their idea of work was embedded in what they did from day to day, and in their very selection of survival strategies. Probably the only way to understand the embeddedness of the idea of work in their routines is to follow each of the informants in turn on a typical daily round.

***Daily work routines***

Stone and Sue's routine begins with the first crack of daylight, and the first blast of static coming from the intercoms of the county prison on the other side of a dry river wash. The couple are camped in a clearing alongside the wash, in a city park at the western edge of Tucson. The couple selected the site mostly because the sight of the prison compound ablaze at night gives them some sense of security. Sleeping outdoors involves many risks, but street people tend to be less afraid of patrolling cops than of the so-called "troll busters" who beat homeless people for the "sport," and freight-train riders who are reputed to rob and kill their victims.

The couple break camp quickly; they want to hit the dumpsters before they are picked over by recyclers more driven than they are. Sue pulls a second pair of pants over her jeans. Stone dons a ski jacket and wool skull cap. They make no attempt to wash, as they will only get filthy again. They pack all of their gear, their entire camp, on the back of their bikes: bedrolls, blankets, coolers, toilet paper, dog food, tobacco tins, pots and pans, a portable radio, Sue' horror-genre novels, Stone's bike tools and dime-store toys. If they left anything behind, it would be stolen or alert patrolling police that they were illegally squatting on public park land.

Before hitting the road, they feed their dog Cheyenne and roll a couple of cigarettes for themselves. The tobacco sees them through till lunch at the "Toolie" soup kitchen downtown, where the usual fare is bologna on white bread with an apple, cookies or potato chips. Lunch is their first and frequently only meal of the day.

The couple then "mount up" on their "horses," the street term for bikes. (See glossary.) Stone, hauling the dog in a trailer, takes the lead, as he is the most practiced at negotiating the streets in heavy traffic. The couple take their so-called "hotel route," one of about a dozen dumpster-diving routes they have mapped out in advance. Each route takes them several miles along the path of a dozen or so commercial dumpsters that the couple have staked out as "theirs." They know the likely contents of each, and what the route as a whole is likely to yield in pounds of recyclable cans and refunds paid by the Honeybee commercial recycling center. In some cases, they know the business people on their routes well enough to be given to what amounts to a license to rifle through their garbage. The maids as the Best Western hotel even save up empties for the couple.

Sue and Stone take turns diving into dumpsters, depending on which one is most familiar with the contents. Sue leaves to Stone the dumpsters outside of hotels frequented by heroin addicts, as the odds are greater here of getting pricked with a contaminated needle and landing in a county hospital with a staph infection or worse. "Diving" into a dumpster is a more complicated business than the word suggests. The diver actually climbs inside the dumpster to rip open bags of garbage. He then more carefully picks through such refuse as rotted food, soiled diapers or menstrual pads to retrieve cans, along with any trifle that can be salvaged for personal use, sold on the streets or pawned for cash. All of this requires some dexterity and nerves of steel.

Sue said she would instruct a novice to "dig in the dumpsters and dig deep. You see a pot, skillet, jewelry, get out and get after it." But a novice must also be prepared to find contaminated needles, animal carcasses and worse. "We found a dead baby [in a dumpster] in Santa Monica," Sue said. "It was the most horrible thing I ever saw in my life. When I look in those dumpsters, I expect to find *anything*. You expect the worst, hope for the best."

While one of them dives inside the dumpster, the other stands outside to smash the cans flat. The more compacted the cans, the more the couple can carry on their bikes. The couple continue on their route till they have collected what they estimate to be about 20 pounds, or $6 worth of cans. "You don't go out there to make a killing," Sue explained. "Four, five bucks, you're cool, 'cause you got it for free." They earn the minimum they need to get through the day. Most of their earnings goes toward pouch tobacco, coke and maybe dinner for two at Carl Junior's. Once they make their quota, they head for the Honeybee recycling center to cash in their cans. The recycling center pays a little less than the market average of 32 cents per pound, but the couple believe it is the most "honest" place, with the fairest scales around.

Though the couple alternate their dumpster-diving routes from day to day, they invariably go to Toolie at around noon. They go less for the food than for the socializing. Toolie is the hub of social life for most of the city's unsheltered homeless. They have put the institution to their own uses, converting its parking lot into a watering hole and impromptu market where the desert nomads convene, trade gossip, trade and sell dumpster finds, and catch up on the street news of the day. As Biker Billy explained, "You show up to see what people are saying: 'Hey, Bill's looking for you.' 'What's his name got busted; they got him with heroin.' 'Judy told me to tell you hi.' 'Duke left town on the rails the other day.'" On any given day, Duke, Biker Billy and Harry are likely to show up here at around the same time, for the same reasons. But they come by way of different routines.

Biker Billy works six hours a day, five days a week as a handyman at a charitable thrift store south of downtown. He was a construction worker in the Midwest till the steel industry "bottomed out;" now he earns $5.75 an hour. "Big money, ain't it? There was a time in my life when I had a home, a car; I made a living, had a little savings. All that stuff that was the American Dream. The dream is over with." He dumpster dives on the weekends to supplement his pay, or to scavenge for bike parts. He rebuilds bikes as a paying sideline, using a corner of the thrift store's garage as his workshop. His supervisor, a "buddy" of his, also allows him to store his gear in the garage. She looks the other way when it comes to his camping overnight in the alley behind the thrift store, and using the facility's electrical outlets to run his portable TV.

On weekdays after work, he first bikes over to Santa Rita Park, a hang out for homeless drug users and alcoholics. On the way, he stops at a convenience mart to buy "dinner," usually a six-pack of beer and a cup of instant soup. At the park, he has a wide acquaintance among the regulars, and is known as being good for a touch. He usually brings a few pairs of thrift-store socks and sweats to give to the more underclad regulars. Or he will share a joint and a few beers with the self-described "bums" Leprechaun, Freebird and Calvin.

The park regulars scatter at about 9 o'clock, when it is dark enough to illegally squat in the areas they have claimed as their camps. Homeless camps can range from elaborate, virtual villages of 20 or more people in tarps, tents and cardboard hutches to a few people in bedrolls parked virtually anywhere – the loading docks, door stoops or parking lots of businesses, public restrooms, city parks, dry river washes, gullies and vacant lots. "What they call a camp," Biker Billy explained, "means it's *their* turf, like a dog with its yard." Biker Billy heads for his camp in the alley, where he will lull himself to sleep watching syndicated sitcoms on his portable TV.

Duke, meanwhile, usually camps with Sue and Stone until they have one of their periodic falling outs. Then he goes to "his place," whose location he keeps secret from everyone. Like the couple, Duke dumpster dives seven days a week, biking along routes he has similarly staked out as his own. But over the past several weeks he has altered his routine to work half days doing odd jobs at a used bike shop. He struck a deal with the owner to put in the time toward the purchase of a new bike trailer. Though most of his gear comes out of dumpsters, Duke makes an exception when it comes to his bike and any of its attachments. They are store bought, he explained, "because my bike is my livelihood; it's the way I get around, make my living."

Like most of the informants here, Duke talks of getting together the equipment and money needed to "hit the road" in the spring. He plans to bike to his native Texas, to see his three grown children. With that aim in mind, he occasionally stoops to go "signing" – the street term for panhandling on the medians at major intersections – especially during the holidays when people are in a charitable mood. There is some skill involved even in signing. Duke believes he has hit on one of the more successful advertising slogans. His sign reads: "Do you have it in your heart to help an old fart like me?"

Harry works weekends on the medians selling the city's daily evening newspaper. He was first hired for the job when the daily sent one of its vans to corral as day laborers whomever they found loitering in parks or streets. Harry cannot earn more than $60 selling newspapers or he jeopardizes his $500 a month in cash assistance. He dumpster dives the rest of the week to earn income that will be off the books.

Harry sleeps in the doorways of businesses on the weekends, when his job takes him across town from his camp in the city park bordering the Santa Cruz river wash. Otherwise, he bunks down in the hutch he built out of the side of a tree, stretching blankets and plastic sheets over its branches to shape something like a geodesic dome. The hutch is furnished with a hammock, shelves made out of milk crates and a couple of coolers serving as his "refrigerator" and "pantry." Outside is the fire pit over which he cooks most of his meals, using mule chips as fuel. There is an abundant supply of the chips, as his camp is located just behind a two-mule dirt farm, underneath a high-tension tower on what, presumably, is public utility property.

Building the hutch was a labor of love, involving many dumpster-diving forays to scavenge all of the construction materials. But Harry is ever scheming to move out of here, into the ramshackle trailer he has had his eye on for months. He made a deal with the manager of the Sleepy Hollow trailer park to buy the trailer outright for a little more than the amount of his monthly Social Security Income (SSI) benefit. But because he can barely make that money last the month, he is ever falling short of the purchase price. The trailer stands vacant to tantalize him with the dream of someday getting off the streets.

### *Redefining work*

In all of these routines, the informants can be seen as negotiating the terms that stigmatize them to conceptualize their most mundane, everyday actions as work – meaningful work that gives their own lives meaning as a testament to their endurance. They define endurance itself as the ability to survive outside of the marketplace, independently of the market's system of values. Asked what constituted a survivor, Stone began thus:

> That George Washington [on a $1 bill] is not a god. It's only a tool to get what you need. But now when you stop off into that dark forest, the only thing that matters is endurance, survival. Ain't no romance about it. You have to be willing to get down and gritty to be a survivor. A survivor is somebody who can make it no matter what.

Here Stone reversed the housed world's value system, as symbolized by a dollar bill, to assert his own worth. Such struggles over meaning were implicit in almost all of the informants' discussions. But they also struggled to articulate new meanings, especially to redefine the meaning of work, and these struggles were expressed less in what they said than in what they did. They painstakingly built and maintained their bikes, because their bikes were their "livelihoods." They braved the hazards of dumpsters to "dig in and dig deep," because dumpster-diving was their chosen occupation. Even camping is a labor-intensive job involving some skill in scavenging gear, constructing hutches, or finding a relatively "safe" site, out of the way of cops, troll busters and the dreaded freight-train riders.

Negotiating the hazards of street life is yet another job, one that Stone described by contesting the housed world's definition of work:

> The first law of staying alive out here is, expect the unexpected. The second law is, take care of yourself. 'Cause who else do you have to depend on? The police? Hell, no. Every one of us that goes down, that's one less [the authorities] have to worry about, one less they've got to feed. You can be an all right person, but people don't look at you like that, 'cause you're not working their 9-to-5 gig. What they don't realize is, it's five times more stressful on the streets. 'Cause anything can happen to you out here.

The informants' struggle to redefine work is probably most manifest in their routines. Their definition of work could be said to drive their routines, and ultimately to drive their selection of survival strategies. Though the many ethnographic studies of the homeless rarely see their survival strategies as strategies, or question why they chose some strategies over others, the fact is that the homeless do consciously choose from a limited array of options. A 1998 unpublished survey (Snow and Shockey 1998) of more than 2,000 homeless in Tucson by two University of Arizona sociologists found that the vast majority, or 64 percent, relied on shelters and soup kitchens. This is a manifestly easier way to go than to dumpster drive for a living, or sleep outdoors.

The informants here are among the so-called "invisible," or uncounted, unsheltered homeless. They chose their particular paths on the street precisely because it involved work, with all that the term implies. "It's a matter of family pride," Stone said. "I've been a steelworker, been in the military, always worked for a living."

The choice of strategies is what distinguishes the informants as "tramps," as opposed to "bums." (See glossary for fuller definitions of the terms.) The distinction is crucial in the hierarchy of homeless street life; tramps stand higher in the hierarchy precisely because they work and bums do not. Sue and Stone explained:

> Sue: "There're bums and there're tramps. A tramp is basically someone who's self-supporting – someone who doesn't ask anyone for anything . . . . Like me and Stone are bike tramps – we're travelers but we're also survivors. We'll go canning, scavenging, anything it takes to survive, but you won't see us on the bread lines very often."
>
> Writer: "And a bum?"
>
> Stone: "A bum, he'll run from soup line to soup line and never do anything for himself. You'll never see him in a dumpster. A bum begs. He's got a bad case of the 'gimmes.' What he don't know is that 'gimme' died some years ago."

The term tramp and bum derive from what ethnographers Snow and Anderson (1993: 58) identified as a traditional "folk schema" among the homeless. In their study, the terms had little import beyond that of making a basic, utilitarian distinction between types. Tramps migrated, working casual or seasonal jobs; bums stayed in place and panhandled. But among the informants here, the terms had a huge significance. They were central to how the informants defined themselves, and central to their struggle to redefine work. As tramps, they were bound by certain, mostly implicit codes of self-sufficiency to avoid the shelters and other such institutional handouts, to return favors with favors, and, as Sue said, "to never ask anyone for anything."

As tramps they were also bound to chart a self-sufficient course on the streets. In defining their survival strategies as "work," the informants asserted their self-sufficiency. And in achieving some measure of symbolic self-sufficiency, they recovered their sense of worth from the degradations of the dominant discourse. Their everyday actions, even more than their words, asserted that they worked to survive, and survived to endure, in the face of their stigmatization as bums.

## Conclusion

This paper applied the Development Dictionary's (Sachs 1992) analysis of the development discourse in the Third World to the question of how the First World homeless experienced a stigmatizing liberal discourse that blamed them for the problem of homelessness. The paper found the study's informants shared the scholars' perception that the discourse itself was the overriding "problem," in the sense that it functioned as something of a covert power in their lives. Its overall bent was to devalue and disempower them. The entire bent of the informants' own discursive struggle was to redefine the dominant discourse's stigmatizing terms so as to recover their value as self-supporting, self-determining workers.

In the context of Freire's (1990) thesis, the informants had seized the power inherent in communication to redefine themselves, hence to redefine their social reality and name their world. In the face of the most impoverished conditions, they had created a world revolving around their own conceptions of work, market, home and family. Their conceptions in turn drove the routines that gave them some actual measure of self-sufficiency. In Freire's terms, the informants had transformed themselves from the objects of oppression to the subjects of their own destinies. In the informants' own words, they were "survivors."

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**Table 1. Demographic profiles of informants** [a]

| *Informants* | *Age* | *Educ* | *Marital status* | *Children* | *Cash benefits* | *Self-described type* | *Camp location* | *Daily routine* | *Drug use* | *Background* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | | *Prison or Military* | *Birth-place* | *Former jobs* |
| Stone | 46 | DK | Widowed, remarried | 6 | $751 per month SSI [b] | Bike tramp | City bike trail bordering dry river wash | Dumpster dives | Pot, crystal meth | Vietnam; two 4-5 year prison terms | Middlesex, NJ | Steelworker |
| Sue | 32 | 12th | Married | 6 | | Bike tramp | City bike trail | Dumpster dives | Crystal meth | No | Reading, PA | Prostitute |
| Duke | 58 | 7th | Widowed | 3 | $2,200 per month disability | Bike tramp | City bike trail | Dumpster dives, panhandles | Recovering alcoholic | Vietnam | Navasota, TX | Trucker, carpenter, mechanic |
| Biker Billy | 52 | 8th | Divorced | None | None | Bike tramp | Alley behind downtown thrift shop | Part-time handyman; dumpster dives | Pot | No | West Virginia | Construction worker |
| Harry | 41 | 12th | Never married | None | $500 per month SSI | Bike tramp | Public utility land bordering river wash | Sells newspapers on medians; dumpster dives | Pot | Army, 2 years in prison | Syracuse, NY | Short-order cook, trucker |

[a] As of 1998, the year of the study

[b] Social Security Income benefits

**Table 2. Categorization of themes into domains**

| ***Recurring themes*** | ***Domains*** |
|---|---|
| Birth families<br>Ad hoc street families for mutual support<br>Street community<br>Toolie soup kitchen for news, information | Family |
| Bums vs. tramps<br>Homeless vs. housed<br>Good vs. bad street people<br>Novices vs. veterans | Social stratification on streets |
| Stigmatization – "get a job"<br>Barbarians<br>Loneliness | Stigmatization |
| The system<br>Babylon<br>Churches<br>Shelters<br>Cops<br>"Joe Blow," representing the housed world | Authority |
| Camps as homes<br>Dangers of camps – police, troll busters, train hobos, drug addicts | Home |
| Rebuilding bikes<br>Dumpster diving<br>Canning<br>Panhandling<br>Surviving<br>Diving routes and strategies<br>Dangers of diving – dirty needles, infections | Work |
| Bikes<br>Cans<br>Dumpster "scores" | Commodities |
| Karma<br>Trading favors<br>Sharing with "family" | Street mode of exchange |
| Jobs<br>Money<br>American Dream<br>Bablyon – imminent collapse of the market | Market |

## Glossary of street terms in Tucson

| | |
|---|---|
| **4-20** | A signal that it is time to smoke a joint |
| **6 up** | A signal that the cops are coming |
| **Buggy pusher** | A homeless person who carries his or her gear in a shopping cart, rather than a backpack or a bike. |
| **Bum** | Defined by tramps as a homeless person who panhandles, freeloads off of other homeless people and is almost entirely dependent on institutional handouts for food, shelter and clothing. Subcategories are "shelter bums" who make the rounds of shelters in town, and "thumb bums" who hitchhike from town to town. |
| **Camp** | Any spot of ground that is claimed as one's own turf at night. A camp can range from a single person in a bedroll to 20 or so people in tarps, tents, cardboard hutches and earthen pits. It can be located in undeveloped public land or public parks, in business parking lots, alongside washes and gullies, in caves, on warehouse loading docks or in abandoned cars or buses. |
| **Canning** | Scavenging anywhere in the streets, alleys and dumpsters for recyclable aluminum cans. |
| **Dumpster diving** | Climbing into dumpsters to forage for recyclable aluminum cans and anything else that can be sold, pawned, rebuilt or reused. |
| **Flying a sign** | Also known as "signing." Panhandling on medians with signs asking for help, food or work. (Rarely do the signs expressly beg for money). |
| **Greenhorn** | Anyone new to the streets. Also known as a "raisin" or "newborn." |
| **Gutter punks** | Punkers (or homeless teens who are stereotyped as such) who camp in gullies and washes. |
| **Horse** | Bike |
| **Miner's salad** | Wild greens -- a dish to which tramps say they resort when they are biking across country. |
| **Pattern** | Also known as a "run." A daily routine of survival that distinguishes one type of homeless person from another. For example, "bums," according to their own account, will make the circuit of soup kitchens for breakfast, lunch and dinner and then hang out in a park until it is safe to retreat to their camps. A typical "rubber tramp" will make his "route" of dumpsters and then bike to the nearest recycling center to cash in before closing time. |
| **Rig** | Syringe (for shooting drugs) |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Road dog** | A sidekick with whom a homeless person pairs for mutual protection, usually while traveling on the road |
| **Rock star** | Rock cocaine, or crack |
| **Sally** | The Salvation Army, also known as the "Starvation Army" |
| **Score** | Refers both to the act of finding a valuable item in a dumpster and the item itself. A valuable item is anything that can be salvaged for personal use, recycled, sold on the streets or pawned for cash. A "ground score" is a valuable item found on the ground. |
| **System** | Also known as "Babylon." In its broadest connotation, the term refers to the system of money and power in this country. But it can also refer variously to big business, the government, the police, the shelters, the housed, or any such force that is seen as regulating the lives of the homeless. |
| **The life** | Street life |
| **Tramp** | Defined by tramps as a transient who is self-sufficient -- who finds food, shelter and clothing on his own. The ways in which he accomplishes this can vary from working day jobs to dumpster diving for food and recyclables. A tramp may still receive SSI or other means-tested benefits; this is not seen as detracting from his self-sufficiency but rather as proof of his having withstood the lure of government dependency.<br>The term "tramp" also denotes someone who "pays his way," despite the lack of material resources. Implicit in this idea is sort of a "karmic code" that mandates that one pay in favors for what one receives in favors, now or in the future, either from other homeless people or from service agencies. |
| **Troll patrol** | Camp residents who band together to patrol the camp grounds, guarding other residents against "troll busters," or people who beat up on the homeless. |